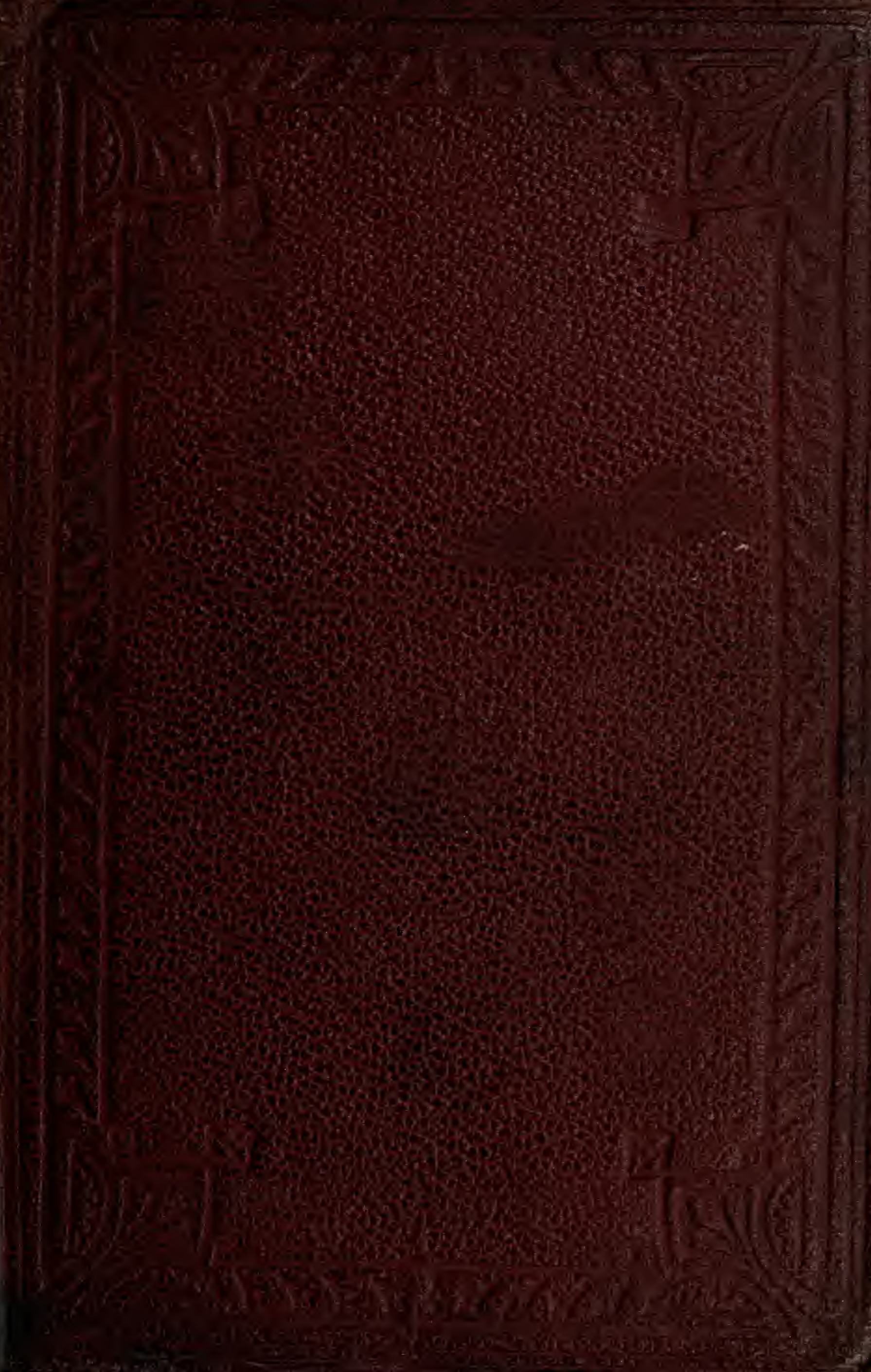

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CECIL CASTLEMAINE'S GAGE,

AND OTHER NOVELETTES.

Louise De la Ramée

BY OUIDA, pseud.

AUTHOR OF 'FOLLE-FARINE,' 'IDALIA,' 'UNDER TWO FLAGS,'
'TWO LITTLE WOODEN SHOES,' ETC.

NEW EDITION.

London:
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CECIL CASTLEMAINE'S GAGE;

OR,

THE STORY OF A BROIDERED SHIELD.

Cecil Castlemaine was the beauty of her county and her line, the handsomest of all the handsome women that had graced her race, when she moved a century and a half ago down the stately staircase and through the gilded and tapestried halls of Lilliesford. The Town had run mad after her, and her face levelled politics, and was cited as admiringly by the Whigs at St. James's as by the Tories at the Cocoa-tree, by the beaux and Mohocks at Garraway's as by the alumni at the Grecian, by the wits at Will's as by the fops at Ozinda's.

Wherever she went, whether to the Haymarket or the Opera, to the 'Change for a fan or the palace for a state ball, to Drury Lane to see Pastoral Philips's dreary dilution of Racine, or to some fair chief of her faction for basset and ombre, she was surrounded by the best men of her time, and hated by Whig beauties with virulent wrath, for she was a Tory to the backbone, indeed a Jacobite at heart; worshipped Bolingbroke, detested Marlborough and Eugene, believed in all the horrors of the programme said to have been plotted by the Whigs for the anniversary show of 1711, and was thought to have prompted the satire on those fair politicians who are disguised as *Rosalinda* and *Nigranilla* in the 81st paper of the *Spectator*.

Cecil Castlemaine was the greatest beauty of her day, lovelier still at four-and-twenty than she had been at seventeen, unwedded, though the highest coronets in the land had been offered to her; far above the coquetries and minauderies of her friends, far above the imitation of the affectations of "Lady Betty Modley's skuttle," or need of practising the Fan exercise; haughty, peerless, radiant, unwon—nay, more—untouched; for the finest gentleman on the town could not flatter himself that he had ever stirred the slightest trace of interest in her, nor boast, as he stood in the inner circle at the Chocolate-house (unless, indeed, he lied more impudently than Tom Wharton himself), that he had ever been honoured by a glance of encouragement from the Earl's daughter. She was too proud to cheapen herself with coquetry, too fastidious to care for her conquests over those who whispered to her through Nicolini's song, vied to have the privilege of carrying her fan, drove past her windows in Soho-square, crowded about her in St. James's Park, paid court even to her little spaniel Indamara, and, to catch but a glimpse of her brocaded train as it swept a ball-room floor, would leave even their play at the Groom Porter's, Mrs. Oldfield in the green-room, a night hunt with Mohun and their brother Mohocks, a circle of wits gathered "within the steam of the coffee-pot" at Will's, a dinner at Halifax's, a supper at Bolingbroke's—whatever, according to their several tastes, made their best entertainment and was hardest to quit.

The highest suitors of the day sought her smile and sued for her hand; men left the Court and the Mall to join the Flanders army before the lines at Bouchain less for loyal love of England than hopeless love of Cecil Castlemain. Her father vainly urged her not to fling away offers that all the women at St. James's envied her. She was untouched and unwon, and when her friends, the court beauties, the fine ladies, the coquettes of quality, rallied her on her coldness (envying her her conquests), she would smile her slight proud smile and bow her stately head. "Perhaps she was cold; she might be; they were personable men? Oh yes! she had nothing to say against them. His Grace of Belamour?—A pretty wit, without doubt. Lord Millamont?—Diverting, but a coxcomb. He had beautiful hands; it was a pity he was always thinking of them! Sir Gage Rivers?—As obsequious a lover as the man in the 'Way of the World,' but she had heard he was very boastful and facetious at women over his chocolate at Ozinda's. The Earl of Argent?—A gallant soldier, surely, but whatever he might protest, no mistress would ever rival with him the dice at the Groom Porter's. Lord Philip Bellairs? —A proper gentleman; no fault in him; a bel esprit and an elegant courtier; pleased many, no doubt, but he did not please her overmuch. Perhaps her taste was too finical, or her character too cold, as they said. She preferred it should be so. When you were content it were folly to seek a change. For her part, she failed to comprehend how women could stoop to flutter their fans and choose their ribbons, and rack their tirewomen's brains for new pulvillios, and lappets, and devices, and practise their curtsey and recovery before their pier-plass, for no better aim or stake than to draw the glance and win the praise of men for whom they cared nothing. A woman who had the eloquence of beauty and a true pride should be above heed for such affectations, pleasure in such applause!"

So she would put them all aside and turn the tables on her friends, and go on her own way, proud, peerless, Cecil Castlemaine, conquering and unconquered; and Steele must have had her name in his thoughts, and honoured it heartily and sincerely, when he wrote one Tuesday, on the 21st of October, under the domino of his Church Coquette, "I say I do honour to those who *can be coquettes and are not such*, but I despise all who would be so, and, in despair of arriving at it themselves, hate and villify all those who can." A definition justly drawn by his keen, quick graver, though doubtless it only excited the ire of, and was entirely lost upon, those who read the paper over their dish of bohea, or over their toilette, while they shifted a patch for an hour before they could determine it, or regretted the loss of ten guineas at crimp.

Cecil Castlemaine was the beauty of the Town: when she sat at Drury Lane on the Tory side of the house, the devoutest admirer of Oldfield or Mrs. Porter scarcely heard a word of the *Heroic Daughter* or the *Amorous Widow*, and the "beau fullest of his own dear self" forgot his silver-fringed gloves, his medallion snuff-box, his knotted cravat, his clouded cane, the slaughter that he planned to do, from gazing at her where she sat, as though she were reigning sovereign at St. James's, the Castlemaine diamonds flashing crescent-like above her brow. At church and court, at park and assembly, there were none who could eclipse that haughty gentlewoman; therefore her fond women friends, who had caressed her so warmly and so gracefully, and pulled her to pieces behind her back, if they could, so eagerly over their dainty cups of tea in an afternoon visit, were glad, one and all, when on "Barnaby-bright," Anglicè, the 22nd (then the 11th) of June, the great Castlemaine chariot, with its three herons blazoned on its coronetted panels, its laced liveries and gilded harness, rolled over the heavy, ill-made roads down into the country in almost princely pomp, the peasants pouring out from the way-side cottages to stare at my lord's coach.

It was said in the town that a portly divine, who wore his scarf as one of the chaplains to the Earl of Castlemaine, had prattled somewhat indiscreetly at Child's of his patron's politics; that certain cypher letters had passed the Channel enclosed in chocolate cakes as soon as French goods were again imported after the peace of Utrecht; that gentlemen in high places were strongly suspected of mischievous designs against the tranquillity of the country and government; that the Earl had, among others, received a friendly hint from a relative in power to absent himself for a while from the Court where he was not best trusted, and the town where an incautious word might be picked up and lead to Tower-hill, and amuse himself at his goodly castle of Lilliesford, where the red deer would not spy upon him, and the dark beech-woods would tell no tales. And the ladies of quality, her dear friends and sisters, were glad when they heard it as they punted at basset and fluttered their fans complacently. They would have the field for themselves, for a season, while Cecil Castlemaine was immured in her manor of Lilliesford; would be free of her beauty to eclipse them at the next birthday, be quit of their most dreaded rival, their most omnipotent leader of fashion: and they rejoiced at the whisper of the cypher letter, the damaging gossipry of the Whig coffee-houses, the bad repute into which my Lord Earl had grown at St. James's, at the misfortune of their friend, in a word, as human nature, masculine or feminine, will ever do—to its shame be it spoken—unless the *fomes peccati* be more completely wrung out of it than it has ever been since the aged Gabriel performed that work of purification on the infant Mahomet.

It was the June of the year '15, and the coming disaffection was seething and boiling secretly among the Tories; the impeachment of Ormond and Bolingbroke had strengthened the distaste to the new-come Hanoverian pack, their attainder had been the blast of air needed to excite the smouldering wood to flame, the gentlemen of that party in the South began to grow impatient of the intrusion of the distant German branch, to think lovingly of the old legitimate line, and to feel something of the chafing irritation of the gentlemen of the North, who were fretting like staghounds held in leash.

Envoys passed to and fro between St. Germain, and Jacobite nobles, priests of the church that had fallen out of favour and were typified as the Scarlet Woman by a rival who, though successful, was still bitter, plotted with ecclesiastical relish in the task; letters were conveyed in rolls of innocent lace, plans were forwarded in frosted confections, messages were passed in invisible cypher that defied investigation. The times were dangerous; full of plot and counter-plot, of risk and danger, of fomenting projects and hidden disaffection—times in which men, living habitually over mines, learned to like the uncertainty, and to think life flavourless without the chance of losing it any hour; and things being in this state, the Earl of Castlemaine deemed it prudent to take the counsel of his friend in power, and retire from London for a while, perhaps for the safety of his own person, perhaps for the advancement of his cause, either of which were easier ensured at his seat in the western counties than amidst the Whigs of the capital.

The castle of Lilliesford was bowered in the thick woods of the western counties, a giant pile built by Norman masons. Troops of deer herded under the gold-green beechen-boughs, the sunlight glistened through the aisles of the trees, and quivered down on to the thick moss, and ferns, and tangled grass that grew under the park woodlands; the water-lilies clustered on the river, and the swans "floated double, swan and shadow," under the leaves that swept into the water; then, when Cecil Castlemaine came down to share her father's retirement, as now, when her name and titles on the gold plate of a coffin that lies with others of her race in the mausoleum across the park, where winter snows and summer sun-rays are alike to those who sleep within, is all that tells at Lilliesford of the loveliest woman of her time who once reigned there as mistress.

The country was in its glad green midsummer beauty, and the musk-rosebuds bloomed in profuse luxuriance over the chill marble of the terraces, and scattered their delicate odorous petals in fragrant showers on the sward of the lawns, when Cecil Castlemaine came down to what she termed her exile. The morning was fair and cloudless, its sunbeams piercing through the darkest glades in the woodlands, the thickest shroud of the ivy, the deepest-hued pane of the mullioned windows, as she passed down the great staircase where lords and gentlewomen of her race gazed on her from the canvas of Lely and Jamesone, Bourdain and Vandyke, crossed the hall with her dainty step, so stately yet so light, and standing by the window of her own bower-room, was lured out on to the terrace overlooking the west side of the park.

She made such a picture as Vandyke would have liked to paint, with her golden glow upon her, and the musk-roses clustering about her round the pilasters of marble—the white chill marble to which Belamour and many other of her lovers of the court and town had often likened her. Vandyke would have lingered lovingly on the hand that rested on her staghound's head, would have caught her air of court-like grace and dignity, would have painted with delighted fidelity her deep azure eyes, her proud brow, her delicate lips arched haughtily like a Cupid's bow, would have picked out every fold of her sweeping train, every play of light on her silken skirts, every dainty tracery of her point-lace. Yet even painted by Sir Anthony, that perfect master of art and of elegance, though more finished it could have hardly been more faithful, more instinct with grace, and life, and dignity, than a sketch drawn of her shortly after that time by one who loved her well, which is still hanging in the gallery at Lilliesford, lighted up by the afternoon sun when it streams in through the western windows.

Cecil Castlemaine stood on the terrace looking over the lawns and gardens through the opening vistas of meeting boughs and interlaced leaves to the woods and hills beyond, fused in a soft mist of green and purple, with her hand lying carelessly on her hound's broad head. She was a zealous Tory, a skilled politician, and her thoughts were busy with the hopes and fears, the chances for and against, of a cause that lay near her heart, but whose plans were yet immature, whose first blow was yet unstruck, and whose well-wishers were sanguine of a success they had not yet hazarded, though they hardly ventured to whisper to each other their previous designs and desires. Her thoughts were far away, and she hardly heeded the beauty round her, musing on schemes and projects dear to her party, that would imperil the Castlemaine coronet, but would serve the only royal house the Castlemaine line had ever in their hearts acknowledged.

She had regretted leaving the Town, moreover; a leader of the mode, a wit, a woman of the world, she missed her accustomed sphere; she was no pastoral Phyllis, no country-born Mistress Fiddy, to pass her time in provincial pleasures, in making cordial waters, in tending her beau-pots, in preserving her fallen rose-leaves, and inspecting the confections in the still-room; as little was she able, like many fine ladies when in similar exile, to while it away by scolding her tirewoman, and sorting a suit of ribbons, in ordering a set of gilded leather hangings from Chelsea for the state chambers, and yawning over chocolate in her bed till mid-day. She regretted leaving the Town, not for Belamour, nor Argent, nor any of those who vainly hoped, as they glanced at the little mirror in the lids of their snuff-boxes that they might have graven themselves, were it ever so faintly, in her thoughts; but for the wits, the pleasures, the choice clique, the accustomed circle to which she was so used, the courtly, brilliant town-life where she was wont to reign.

So she stood on the terrace the first morning of her exile, her thoughts far away, with the loyal gentlemen of the North, and the banished court of St. Germain, the lids drooping proudly over her haughty eyes, and her lips half parted with a faint smile of triumph in the visions limned by ambition and imagination, while the wind softly stirred the rich lace of her bodice, and her fingers lay, lightly yet firmly, on the head of her staghound. She looked up at last as she heard the ring of a horse's hoofs, and saw a sorrel, covered with dust and foam, spurred up the avenue, which, rounding past the terrace, swept on to the front entrance; the sorrel looked well-nigh spent, and his rider somewhat worn and languid, as a man might do with justice who had been in boot and saddle twenty-four hours at the stretch, scarce stopping for a stoup of wine; but he lifted his hat, and bowed down to his saddle bow as he passed her.

"Was it the long-looked-for messenger with definite news from St. Germain?" wondered Lady Cecil, as her hound gave out a deep-tongued bay of anger at the stranger. She went back into her bower-room, and toyed absently with her flowered handkerchief, broidering a stalk to a violet-leaf, and wondering what additional hope the horseman might have brought to strengthen the good Cause, till her servants brought word that his Lordship prayed the pleasure of her presence in the octagon-room. Whereat she rose, and swept through the long corridors, entered the octagon-room, the sunbeams gathering about her rich dress as they passed through the stained glass oriels, and saluted the new-comer, when her father presented him to her as their trusty and welcome friend and envoy, Sir Fulke Ravensworth, with her careless dignity, and queenly grace, that nameless air which was too highly bred to be condescension, but markedly and proudly repelled familiarity, and signed a pale of distance beyond which none must intrude.

The new-comer was a tall and handsome man, of noble presence, bronzed by foreign suns, pale and jaded just now with hard riding, while his dark silver-laced suit was splashed and covered with dust; but as he bowed low to her, critical Cecil Castlemaine saw that not Belamour himself could have better grace, not my Lord Millamont courtlier mien nor whiter hands, and listened with gracious air to what her father unfolded to her of his mission from St. Germain, whither he had come, at great personal risk, in many disguises, and at breathless speed, to place in their hands a precious letter in cypher from James Stuart to his well-beloved and loyal subject Herbert George, Earl of Castlemaine. A letter spoken of with closed doors and in low whispers, loyal as was the household, supreme as the Earl reigned over his domains of Lilliesford, for these were times when men mistrusted those of their own blood, and when the very figures on the tapestry seemed instinct with life to spy and to betray—when they almost feared the silk that tied a missive should babble of its contents, and the hound that slept beside them should read and tell their thoughts.

To leave Lilliesford would be danger to the Envoy and danger to the Cause; to stay as guest was to disarm suspicion. The messenger who had brought such priceless news must rest within the shelter of his roof; too much were risked by returning to the French coast yet awhile, or even by joining Mar or Derwentwater, so the Earl enforced his will upon the Envoy, and the Envoy thanked him, and accepted.

Perchance the beauty, whose eyes he had seen lighten and proud brow flush as she read the royal greeting and injunction, made a sojourn near her presence not distasteful; perchance he cared little where he stayed till the dawning time of action and of rising should arrive, when he should take the field and fight till life or death for the "White Rose and the long heads of hair." He was a soldier of fortune, a poor gentleman with no patrimony but his name, no chance of distinction save by his sword; sworn to a cause whose star was set for ever; for many years his life had been of changing adventure and shifting chances, now fighting with Berwick at Almanza, now risking his life in some delicate and dangerous errand for James Stuart that could not have been trusted so well to any other officer about St. Germain; gallant to rashness, yet with much of the acumen of the diplomatist, he was invaluable to his Court and Cause, but, Stuart-like, men-like, they hastened to employ, but ever forgot to reward!

Lady Cecil missed her town-life, and did not over-favour her exile in the western counties. To note down on her Mather's tablets the drowsy homilies droned out by the chaplain on a Sabbath noon, to play at crambo, to talk with her tirewoman of new washes for the skin, to pass her hours away in knotting?—she, whom Steele might have writ of when he drew his character of *Eudoxia*, could while her exile with none of these inanities; neither could she consort with gentry who seemed to her little better than the boors of a country wake, who had never heard of Mr. Spectator and knew nothing of Mr. Cowley, countrywomen whose ambition was in their cowslip wines, fox-hunters more ignorant and uncouth than the dumb brutes they followed.

Who was there for miles around with whom she could stoop to associate, with whom she cared to exchange a word? Madam from the vicarage, in her grogram, learned in syrups, salves, and possets? Country Lady Bountifuls, with gossip of the village and the poultry-yard? Provincial Peeresses, who had never been to London since Queen Anne's coronation? A squirearchy, who knew of no music save the concert of their stop-hounds, no court save the court of the county assize, no literature unless by miracle 'twere Tarleton's Jests? None such as these could cross the inlaid oak parquet of Lilliesford, and be ushered into the presence of Cecil Castlemaine.

So the presence of the Chevalier's messenger was not altogether unwelcome and distasteful to her. She saw him but little, merely conversing at table with him with that distant and dignified courtesy which marked her out from the light, free, inconsequent manners in vogue with other women of quality of her time; the air which had chilled half the softest things even on Belamour's lips, and kept the vainest coxcomb hesitating and abashed.

But by degrees she observed that the Envoy was a man who had lived in many countries and in many courts, was well versed in the tongues of France and Italy and Spain—in their belles lettres too, moreover—and had served his apprenticeship to good company in the salons of Versailles, in the audience-room of the Vatican, at the receptions of the Duchess du Maine, and with the banished family at St. Germain. He spoke with a high and sanguine spirit of the troublous times approaching and the beloved Cause whose crisis was at hand, which chimed in with her humour better than the flippancies of Belamour, the airy nothings of Millamont. He was but a soldier of fortune, a poor gentleman who, named to her in the town, would have had never a word, and would have been unnoted amidst the crowding beaux who clustered round to hold her fan and hear how she had been pleasured with the drolleries of *Grief à la Mode.* But down in the western counties she deigned to listen to the Prince's officer, to smile—a smile beautiful when it came on her proud lips, as the play of light on the opals of her jewelled stomacher—nay, even to be amused when he spoke of the women of foreign courts, to be interested when he told, which was but reluctantly, of his own perils, escapes, and adventures, to discourse with him, riding home under the beech avenues from hawking, or standing on the western terrace at curfew to watch the sunset, of many things on which the nobles of the Mall and the gentlemen about St. James's had never been allowed to share her opinions. For Lady Cecil was deeply read (unusually deeply for her day, since fine ladies of her rank and fashion mostly contented themselves with skimming a romance of Scuderi's, or an act of *Aurungzebe*); but she rarely spoke of those things, save perchance now and then to Mr. Addison, who, though a Whig, was certainly an elegant scholar.

Fulke Ravensworth never flattered her, moreover, and flattery was a honeyed confection of which she had long been cloyed; he even praised boldly before her other women of beauty and grace whom he had seen at Versailles, at Sceaux, and at St. Germain; neither did he defer to her perpetually, but where he differed would combat her sentiments courteously but firmly. Though a soldier and a man of action, he had an admirable skill at the limner's art; could read to her the Divina Commedia, or the comedies of Lope da' Vega, and transfer crabbed Latin and abstruse Greek into elegant English for her pleasure; and though a beggared gentleman of most precarious fortunes, he would speak of life and its chances, of the Cause and its perils, with a daring which she found preferable to the lisped languor of the men of the town, who had no better campaigns than laying siege to a prude, cared for no other weapons than their toilettes and snuff-boxes, and sought no other excitement than a *coup d'éclat* with the lion-tumblers.

On the whole, through these long midsummer days, Lady Cecil found the Envoy from St. Germain a companion that did not suit her ill, sought less the solitude of her bower-room, and listened graciously to him in the long twilight hours, while the evening dew gathered in the cups of the musk-roses, and the star-rays began to quiver on the water-lilies floating on the river below, that murmured along, with endless song, under the beechen-boughs. A certain softness stole over her, relaxing the cold hauteur of which Belamour had so often complained, giving a nameless charm, supplying a nameless something, lacking before, in the beauty of The Castlemaine.

She would stroke, half sadly, the smooth feathers of her tartaret falcon Gabrielle when Fulke Ravensworth brought her the bird from the ostreger's wrist, with its azure velvet hood, and silver bells and jesses. She would wonder, as she glanced through Corneille or Congreve, Philips or Petrarca, what it was, this passion of love, of which they all treated, on which they all turned, no matter how different their strain. And now and then would come over her cheek and brow a faint fitful wavering flush, delicate and changing as the flush from the rose-hued reflexions of western clouds on a statue of Pharos marble, and then she would start and rouse herself, and wonder what she ailed, and grow once more haughty, calm, stately, dazzling, but chill as the Castlemaine diamonds that she wore.

So the summer-time passed, and the autumn came, the corn-lands brown with harvest, the hazel-copses strewn with fallen nuts, the beech-leaves turning into reddened gold. As the wheat ripened but to meet the sickle, as the nuts grew but to fall, as the leaves turned to gold but to wither, so the sanguine hopes, the fond ambitions of men strengthened and matured only to fade into disappointment and destruction! Four months had sped by since the Prince's messenger had come to Lilliesford—months that had gone swiftly with him as some sweet delicious dream; and the time had come when he had orders to ride north, secretly and swiftly, speak with Mr. Forster and other gentlemen concerned in the meditated rising, and convey despatches and instructions to the Earl of Mar; for Prince James was projecting soon to join his loyal adherents in Scotland, and the critical moment was close at hand, the moment when, to Fulke Ravensworth's high and sanguine courage, victory seemed certain; failure, if no treachery marred, no dissension weakened, impossible; the moment to which he looked for honour, success, distinction, that should give him claim and title to aspire—*where?* Strong man, cool soldier though he was, he shrank from drawing his fancied future out from the golden haze of immature hope, lest he should see it wither upon closer sight. He was but a landless adventurer, with nothing but his sword and his honour, and kings he knew were slow to pay back benefits, or recollect the hands that hewed them free passage to their thrones.

Cecil Castlemaine stood within the window of her bower-room, the red light of the October sun glittering on her gold-broidered skirt and her corsage sewn with opals and emeralds; her hand was pressed lightly on her bosom, as though some pain were throbbing there; it was new this unrest. this weariness, this vague weight that hung upon her; it was the perils of their Cause, she told herself; the risks her father ran: it was weak, childish, unworthy a Castlemaine! Still the pain throbbed there.

Her hound, asleep beside her, raised his head with a low growl as a step intruded on the sanctity of the bower-room, then composed himself again to slumber, satisfied it was no foe. His mistress turned slowly; she knew the horses waited; she had shunned this ceremony of farewell, and never thought any would be bold enough to venture here without permission sought and gained.

"Lady Cecil, I could not go upon my way without one word of parting. Pardon me if I have been too rash to seek it here."

Why was it that his brief frank words ever pleased her better than Belamour's most honeyed phrases, Millamont's suavest periods? She scarcely could have told, save that there were in them an earnestness and truth new and rare to her ear and to her heart.

She pressed her hand closer on the opals—the jewels of calamity—and smiled:

"Assuredly I wish you God speed, Sir Fulke, and safe issue from all perils."

He bowed low; then raised himself to his fullest height, and stood beside her, watching the light play upon the opals:

"That is all you vouchsafe me?"

"*All?* It is as much as you would claim, sir, is it not? It is more than I would say to many."

"Your pardon—it *is* more than I should claim if prudence were ever by, if reason always ruled! I have no right to ask for, seek for, even wish for, more; such petitions may only be addressed by men of wealth and of high title: a landless soldier should have no pride to sting, no heart to wound; they are the prerogative of a happier fortune."

Her lips turned white, but she answered haughtily; the crimson light flashing in her jewels, heirlooms priceless and hereditary, like her beauty and her pride:

"This is strange language, sir! I fail to apprehend you."

"You have never thought that I ran a danger deadlier than that which I have ever risked on any field? You have never guessed that I have had the madness, the presumption, the crime—it may be in your eyes—to love you."

The colour flushed to her face, crimsoning even her brow, and then fled back. Her first instinct was insulted pride—a beggared gentleman, a landless soldier, spoke to her of love! —of love!—which Belamour had barely had courage to whisper of; which none had dared to sue of her in return. He had ventured to feel this for her! he had ventured to speak of this to her!

The Envoy saw the rising resentment, the pride spoken in every line of her delicate face, and stopped her as she would have spoken.

"Wait! I know all you would reply. You think it infinite daring, presumption that merits highest reproof——"

"Since you divined so justly, it were pity you subjected yourself and me to this most useless, most unexpected interview. Why——"

"*Why?* Because, perchance, in this life you will see my face no more, and you will think gently, mercifully of my offence (if offence it be to love you more than life, and only less than honour), when you know that I have fallen for the Cause, with your name in my heart, held only the dearer because never on my lips! Sincere love can be no insult to whomsoever proffered; Elizabeth Stuart saw no shame to her in the devotion of William Craven!"

Cecil Castlemaine stood in the crimson glory of the autumn sunset, her head erect, her pride unshaken, but her heart stirred strangely and unwontedly. It smote the one with bitter pain, to think a penniless exile should thus dare to speak of what Princes and Dukes had almost feared to whisper; what had she done—what had she said, to give him license for such liberty? It stirred the other with a tremulous warmth, a vague, sweet pleasure, that were never visitants there before; but that she scouted instantly as weakness, folly, debasement, in the Last of the Castlemaines.

He saw well enough what passed within her, what made her eyes so troubled, yet her brow and lips so proudly set, and he bent nearer towards her, the great love that was in him trembling in his voice:

"Lady Cecil, hear me! If in the coming struggle I win distinction, honour, rank—if victory come to us, and the King we serve remember me in his prosperity as he does now in his adversity—if I can meet you hereafter with tidings of triumph and success, my name made one which England breathes with praise and pride, honours gained such as even you will deem worthy of your line—then—then—will you let me speak of what you refuse to hearken to now—then may I come to you, and seek a gentler answer?"

She looked for a moment upon his face, as it bent towards her in the radiance of the sunset light, the hope that hopes all things glistening in his eyes, the high-souled daring of a gallant and sanguine spirit flushing his forehead, the loud throbs of his heart audible in the stillness around; and her proud eyes grew softer, her lips quivered for an instant.

Then she turned towards him with queenly grace:

"*Yes!*"

It was spoken with stately dignity, though scarce above her breath; but the hue that wavered in her cheek was but the lovelier, for the pride that would not let her eyes droop nor her tears rise; would not let her utter one softer word. That one word cost her much. That single utterance was much from Cecil Castlemaine.

Her handkerchief lay at her feet, a delicate, costly toy of lace, embroidered with her shield and chiffre; he stooped and raised it, and thrust it to his breast to treasure it there.

"If I fail, I send this back in token that I renounce all hope; if I can come to you with honour and with fame, this shall be my gage that I may speak, that you will listen?"

She bowed her noble head, ever held haughtily, as though every crown of Europe had a right to circle it; his hot lips lingered for a moment on her hand; then Cecil Castlemaine stood alone in the window of her bower-room, her hand pressed again upon the opals under which her heart was beating with a dull, weary pain, looking out over the landscape, where the golden leaves were falling fast, and the river, tossing sadly dead branches on its waves, was bemoaning in plaintive language the summer days gone by.

Two months came and went, the beech-boughs, black and sear, creaked in the bleak December winds that sighed through frozen ferns and over the couches of shivering deer, the snow drifted up on the marble terrace, and ice-drops clung where the warm rosy petals of the musk-rosebuds had nestled. Across the country came terrible whispers that struck the hearts of men of loyal faith to the White Rose with a bolt of ice-cold terror and despair. Messengers riding in hot haste, open-mouthed peasants gossiping by the village forge, horsemen who tarried for a breathless rest at alehouse doors, Whig divines who returned thanks for God's most gracious mercy in vouchsafing victory to the strong, all told the tale, all spread the news of the drawn battle of Sheriff-Muir, of the surrender under Preston Walls, of the flight of Prince James. The tidings came one by one to Lilliesford, where my Lord Earl was holding himself in readiness to co-operate with the gentlemen of the North to set up the royal standard, broidered by his daughter's hands, in the western counties, and proclaim James III. "sovereign lord and king of the realms of Great Britain and Ireland." The tidings came to Lilliesford, and Cecil Castlemaine clenched her white jewelled hands in passionate anguish that a Stuart should have fled before the traitor of Argyll, instead of dying with his face towards the rebel crew; that men had lived who could choose surrender instead of heroic death; that *she* had not been there, at Preston, to shame them with a woman's reading of courage and of loyalty, and show them how to fall with a doomed city rather than yield captive to a foe!

Perhaps amidst her grief for her Prince and for his Cause mingled—as the deadliest thought of all—a memory of a bright proud face, that had bent towards her with tender love and touching grace a month before, and that might now be lying pale and cold, turned upwards to the winter stars, on the field of Sheriff-Muir.

A year rolled by. Twelve months had fled since the gilded carriage of the Castlemaines, with the lordly blazonment upon its panels, its princely retinue and stately pomp, had come down into the western counties. The bones were crumbling white in the coffins in the Tower, and the skulls over Temple-bar had bleached white in winter snows and spring-tide suns; Kenmuir had gone to a sleep that knew no wakening, and Derwentwater had laid his fair young head down for a thankless cause; the heather bloomed over the mounds of dead on the plains of Sheriff-Muir, and the yellow gorse blossomed under the city walls of Preston.

Another summer had dawned, bright and laughing, over England; none the less fair for human lives laid down, for human hopes crushed out; daisies powdering the turf sodden with human blood, birds carolling their song over graves of heaped up dead. The musk-roses tossed their delicate heads again amidst the marble pilasters, and the hawthorn boughs shook their fragrant buds into the river of Lilliesford, the purple hills lay wrapped in sunny mist, and hyacinth bells mingled with the tangled grass and fern under the woodland shades, where the red deer nestled happily. Herons plumed their silvery wings down by the water-side, swallows circled in sultry air above the great bell-tower, and wood-pigeons cooed with soft love-notes among the leafy branches. Yet the Countess of Castlemaine, last of her race, sole owner of the lands that spread around her, stood on the rose-terrace, finding no joy in the sunlight about her, no melody in the song of the birds.

She was the last of her name; her father, broken-hearted at the news from Dumblain and Preston, had died the very day after his lodgement in the Tower. There was no heir male of his line, and the title had passed to his daughter; there had been thoughts of confiscation and attainder, but others, unknown to her, solicited what she scorned to ask for herself, and the greed of the hungry "Hanoverian pack" spared the lands and the revenues of Lilliesford. In haughty pride, in lonely mourning, the fairest beauty of the Court and Town withdrew again to the solitude of her western counties, and tarried there, dwelling amidst her women and her almost regal household, in the sacred solitude of grief, wherein none might intrude. Proud Cecil Castlemaine was yet prouder than of yore; alone sorrowing for her ruined Cause and exiled King, she would hold converse with none of those who had had a hand in drawing down the disastrous fate she mourned, and only her staghound could have seen the weariness upon her face when she bent down to him, or Gabrielle the falcon felt her hand tremble when it stroked her folded wings. She stood on the terrace, looking over her spreading lands, not the water-lilies on the river below whiter than her lips, pressed painfully together. Perhaps she repented of certain words, spoken to one whom now she would never again behold—perhaps she thought of that delicate toy that was to have been brought back in victory and hope, that now might lie stained and stiffened with blood next a lifeless heart, for never a word in the twelve months gone by had there come to Lilliesford as tidings of Fulke Ravensworth.

Her pride was dear to her, dearer than ought else; she had spoken as was her right to speak, she had done what became a Castlemaine; it would have been weakness to have acted otherwise; what was he—a landless soldier—that he should have dared as he had dared? Yet the sables she wore were not solely for the dead Earl, not solely for the lost Stewarts the hot mist that would blind the eyes of Cecil Castlemaine, as hours swelled to days, and days to months, and she—the flattered beauty of the Court and Town—stayed in self-chosen solitude in her halls of Lilliesford, still unwedded and unwon.

The noon hours chimed from the bell-tower, and the sunny beauty of the morning but weighed with heavier sadness on her heart; the song of the birds, the busy hum of the gnats, the joyous ring of the silver bell round her pet fawn's neck, as it darted from her side under the drooping boughs—none touched an answering chord of gladness in her. She stood looking over her stretching woodlands in deep thought, so deep that she heard no step over the lawn beneath, nor saw the frightened rush of the deer, as a boy, crouching among the tangled ferns, sprang up from his hiding-place under the beechen branches, and stood on the terrace before her, craving her pardon in childish, yet fearless tones. She turned, bending on him that glance which had made the over-bold glance of Princes fall abashed. The boy was but a little tatterdemalion to have ventured thus abruptly into the presence of the Countess of Castlemaine; still it was with some touch of a page's grace that he bowed before her.

"Lady, I crave your pardon, but my master bade me watch for you, though I watched till midnight."

"Your master!"

A flush, warm as that on the leaves of the musk-roses, rose to her face for an instant, then faded as suddenly. The boy did not notice her words, but went on in an eager whisper, glancing anxiously round, as a hare would glance fearing the hunters.

"And told me when I saw you not to speak his name, but only to give you this as his gage, that though all else is lost he has not forgot *his* honour nor *your* will."

Cecil Castlemaine spoke no word, but she stretched out her hand and took it—her own costly toy of cambric and lace, with her broidered shield and coronet.

"Your master! Then—he lives?"

"Lady, he bade me say no more. You have his message; I must tell no further."

She laid her hand upon his shoulder, a light, snow-white hand, yet one that held him now in a clasp of steel.

"Child! answer me at your peril! Tell me of him whom you call your master. Tell me all—quick—quick!"

"You are his friend?"

"His friend? My Heaven! Speak on!"

"He bade me tell no more on peril of his heaviest anger; but if you *are* his friend I sure may speak what you should know without me. It is a poor friend, lady, who has need to ask whether another be dead or living!"

The scarlet blood flamed in the Countess's blanched face, she signed him on with impetuous command; she was unused to disobedience, and the child's words cut her to the quick.

"Sir Fulke sails for the French coast to-morrow night," the boy went on, in tremulous haste. "He was left for dead—our men ran one way, and Argyll's men the other—on the field of Sheriff-Muir; and sure if he had not been strong indeed, he would have died that awful night, untended, on the bleak moor, with the wind roaring round him, and his life ebbing away. He was not one of those who *fled;* you know that of him if you know aught. We got him away before dawn, Donald and I, and hid him in a shieling; he was in the fever then, and knew nothing that was done to him, only he kept that bit of lace in his hand for weeks and weeks, and would not let us stir it from his grasp. What magic there was in it we wondered often, but 'twas a magic, mayhap, that got him well at last; it was an even chance but that he died, God bless him! though we did what best we could. We've been wandering in the Highlands all the year, hiding here and tarrying there. Sir Fulke sets no count upon his life. Sure I think he thanks us little for getting him through the fever of the wounds, but he could not have borne to be pinioned, you know, lady, like a thief, and hung up by the brutes of Whigs, as a butcher hangs sheep in the shambles! The worst of the danger's over—they've had their fill of the slaughter; but we sail to-morrow night for the French coast—England's no place for my master."

Cecil Castlemaine let go her hold upon the boy, and her hand closed convulsively upon the dainty handkerchief—her gage sent so faithfully back to her!

The child looked upon her face; perchance, in his master's delirium, he had caught some knowledge of the story that hung to that broidered toy.

"If you *are* his friend, Madam, doubtless you have some last word to send him?"

Cecil Castlemaine, whom nothing moved, whom nothing softened, bowed her head at the simple question, her heart wrestling sorely, her lips set together in unswerving pride, a mist before her haughty eyes, the broidered shield upon her handkerchief—the shield of her stately and unyielding race—pressed close against her breast.

"You have no word for him, lady?"

Her lips parted; she signed him away. Was this child to see her yielding to such weakness? Had she, Countess of Castlemaine, no better pride, no better strength, no better power of resolve, than this?

The boy lingered.

"I will tell Sir Fulke then, lady, that the ruined have no friends?"

Whiter and prouder still grew the delicate beauty of her face; then she raised her stately head, haughtily as she had used to glance over a glittering Court, where each voice murmured praise of her loveliness and reproach of her coldness; and placed the fragile toy of lace back in the boy's hands.

"Go, seek your master, and give him this in gage that their calamity makes friends more dear to us than their success. Go, he will know its meaning!"

In place of the noon chimes the curfew was ringing from the bell tower, the swallows were gone to roost amidst the ivy, and the herons slept with their heads under their silvery wings among the rushes by the river-side, the ferns and wild hyacinths were damp with evening dew, and the summer starlight glistened amidst the quivering woodland leaves. There was the silence of coming night over the vast forest glades, and no sound broke the stillness, save the song of the grasshopper stirring the tangled grasses, or the sweet low sigh of the west wind fanning the bells of the flowers. Cecil Castlemaine stood once more on the rose-terrace, shrouded in the dense twilight shade flung from above by the beech-boughs, waiting, listening, catching every rustle of the leaves, every tremor of the heads of the roses, yet hearing nothing in the stillness around but the quick, uncertain throbs of her heart beating like the wing of a caged bird under its costly lace. Pride was forgotten at length, and she only remembered—fear and love.

In the silence and the solitude came a step that she knew, came a presence that she felt. She bowed her head upon her hands; it was new to her this weakness, this terror, this anguish of joy; she sought to calm herself, to steel herself, to summon back her pride, her strength; she scorned herself for it all!

His hand touched her, his voice fell on her ear once more, eager, breathless, broken.

"Cecil! Cecil! is this true? Is my ruin thrice blessed, or am I mad, and dream of heaven?"

She lifted her head and looked at him with her old proud glance, her lips trembling with words that all her pride could not summon into speech; then her eyes filled with warm, blinding tears, and softened to new beauty;—scarce louder than the sigh of the wind among the flower-bells came her words to Fulke Ravensworth's ear, as her royal head bowed on his breast:

"Stay, stay! Or, if you fly, your exile shall be my exile, your danger my danger!"

The kerchief is a treasured heirloom to her descendants now, and fair women of her race, who inherit from her her azure eyes and her queenly grace, will recal how the proudest Countess of their Line loved a ruined gentleman so well that she was wedded to him at even, in her private chapel, at the hour of his greatest peril, his lowest fortune, and went with him across the seas till friendly intercession in high places gained them royal permission to dwell again at Lilliesford unmolested. And how it was ever noticeable to those who murmured at her coldness and her pride, that Cecil Castlemaine, cold and negligent as of yore to all the world beside, would seek her husband's smile, and love to meet his eyes, and cherish her beauty for his sake, and be restless in his absence even for the short span of a day, with a softer and more clinging tenderness than was found in many weaker, many humbler women.

They are gone now the men and women of that generation, and their voices come only to us through the faint echo of their written words. In summer nights the old beech-trees toss their leaves in the silvery light of the stars, and the river flows on unchanged, with the ceaseless, mournful burden of its mystic song, the same now as in the midsummer of a century and a half ago. The cobweb handkerchief lies before me with its broidered shield; the same now as long years since, when it was treasured close in a soldier's breast, and held by him dearer than all save his honour and his word. So, things pulseless and passionless endure, and human life passes away as swiftly as a song dies off from the air—as quickly succeeded, and as quickly forgot! Ronsard's refrain is the refrain of our lives:

Le temps s'en va, le temps s'en, ma dame!
Las! le temps, non; mais *nous*, nous en allons!

LITTLE GRAND AND THE MARCHIONESS;

OR,

OUR MALTESE PEERAGE.

ALL first things are voted the best: first kisses, first *toga virilis,* first hair of the first whisker; first speeches are often so superior that members subside after making them, fearful of eclipsing themselves; first money won at play must always be best, as it is always the dearest bought; and first wives are always so super-excellent, that, if a man lose one, he is generally as fearful of hazarding a second as a trout of biting twice.

But of all first things commend me to one's first uniform. No matter that we get sick of harness, and get into mufti as soon as we can now; there is no more exquisite pleasure than the first sight of oneself in shako and sabretasche. How we survey ourselves in the glass, and ring for hot water, that the handsome housemaid may see us in all our glory, and lounge accidentally into our sister's schoolroom, that the governess, who is nice-looking and rather flirty, may go down on the spot before us and our scarlet and gold, chains and buttons! One's first uniform! Oh! the exquisite sensation locked up for us in that first box from Sagnarelli, or Bond-street!

I remember *my* first uniform. I was eighteen—as raw a young cub as you could want to see. I had not been licked into shape by a public school, whose tongue may be rough, but cleans off grievances and nonsense better than anything else. I had been in that hotbed of effeminacy, Church principles and weak tea, a Private Tutor's, where mamma's darlings are wrapped up, and stuffed with a little Terence and Horace to show grand at home; and upon my life I do believe my sister Julia, aged thirteen, was more wide awake and up to life than I was, when the governor, an old rector, who always put me in mind of the Vicar of Wakefield, got me gazetted to as crack a corps as any in the Line.

The —th (familiarly known in the Service as the "Dare Devils," from old Peninsular deeds) were just then at Malta, and with, among other trifles, a chest protector from my father, and a recipe for milk arrowroot from my Aunt Matilda who lived in a constant state of catarrh and of cure for the same, tumbled across the Bay of Biscay, and found myself in Byron's confounded "little military hot-house," where most military men, some time or other, have roasted themselves to death, climbing its hilly streets, flirting with its Valetta belles, drinking Bass in its hot verandahs, yawning with ennui in its palace, cursing its sirocco, and being done by its Jew sharpers.

From a private tutor's to a crack mess at Malta!—from a convent to a casino could hardly be a greater change. Just at first I was as much astray as a young pup taken into a stubble-field, and wondering what the deuce he is to do there; but as it is a pup's nature to sniff at birds and start them, so is it a boy's nature to snatch at the champagne of life as soon as he catches sight of it, though you may have brought him up on water from his cradle. I took to it, at least, like a retriever to water-ducks, though I was green enough to be a first-rate butt for many a day, and the practical jokes I had passed on me would have furnished the *Times* with food for crushers on "The Shocking State of the Army" for a twelvemonth. My chief friend and ally, tormentor and initiator, was a little fellow, Cosmo Grandison; in Ours he was "Little Grand" to everybody, from the Colonel to the baggage-women. He was seventeen, and had joined about a year. What a pretty boy he was, too! All the fair ones in Valetta, from his Excellency's wife to our washerwomen, admired that boy, and spoilt him and petted him, and I do not believe there was a man of Ours who would have had heart to sit in court-martial on Little Grand if he had broken every one of the Queen's regulations, and set every General Order at defiance. I think I see him now—he was new to Malta as I, having just landed with the Dare Devils, *en route* from India to Portsmouth—as he sat one day on the table in the mess-room as cool as a cucumber, in spite of the broiling sun, smoking and swinging his legs, and settling his forage-cap on one side of his head, as pretty-looking, plucky, impudent a young monkey as ever piqued himself on being an old hand, and a knowing bird not to be caught by any chaff however ingeniously prepared.

"Simon," began Little Grand (my "St. John," first barbarised by Mr. Pope for the convenience of his dactyles and hexameters into Sinjin, being further barbarised by this little imp into Simon)—"Simon, do you want to see the finest woman in this confounded little pepper-box? You're no judge of a woman, though, you muff—taste been warped, perhaps, by constant contemplation of that virgin Aunt Minerva—Matilda, is it? all the same."

"Hang your chaff," said I; "you'd make one out a fool."

"Precisely, my dear Simon; just what you are!" responded Little Grand, presently. "Bless your heart, I've been engaged to half a dozen women since I joined. A man can hardly help it, you see; they've such a way of drawing you on, you don't like to disappoint them, poor little dears, and so you compromise yourself out of sheer benevolence. There's such a run on a handsome man—it's a great bore. Sometimes I think I shall shave my head, or do something to disfigure myself as Spurina did. Poor fellow, I feel for him! Well, Simon, you don't seem curious to know who my beauty is?"

"One of those Mitchell girls of the Twenty-first? You waltzed with 'em all night; but they're too tall for you, Grand."

"The Mitchell girls!" ejaculated he, with supreme scorn. "Great maypoles! they go about with the Fusiliers, like a pair of colours. On every ball-room battle-field one's safe to see *them* flaunting away, and as everybody has a shot at 'em, their hearts must be pretty well riddled into holes by this time. No, mine's rather higher game than that. My mother's brother-in-law's aunt's sister's cousin's cousin once removed was Viscount Twaddle, and I don't go anything lower than the Peerage."

"What, is it somebody you've met at his Excellency's?"

"Wrong again, beloved Simon. It's nobody I've met at old Stars and Garters', though his lady-wife could no more do without me than without her sal-volatile and flirtations. No, *she* don't go there; she's too high for that sort of thing—sick of it. After all the European Courts, Malta must be rather small and slow. I was introduced to her yesterday, and," continued Little Grand, more solemnly than was his wont, "I do assure you she's superb, divine; and I'm not very easy to please."

"What's her name?" I asked, rather impressed with this view of a lady too high for old Stars and Garters, as we irreverently termed her Majesty's representative in her island of Malta.

Little Grand took his pipe out of his lips to correct me with more dignity.

"Her *title*, my dear Simon, is the Marchioness St. Julian."

"Is that an English peerage, Grand?"

"Hum! What! Oh yes, of course! What else should it be, you owl?"

Not being in a condition to decide this point I was silent, and he went on, growing more impressive at each phrase:

"She is splendid, really! And I'm a very *difficile* fellow, you know; but such hair, such eyes, one doesn't see every day in those sun-dried Mitchells, or those little pink Bovilliers. Well, yesterday, after that confounded luncheon (how I hate all those complimentary affairs!—one can't enjoy the truffles for talking to the ladies, nor enjoy the ladies for discussing the truffles), I went for a ride with Conran out to Villa Neponte. I left him there, and went down to see the overland steamers come in. While I was waiting, I got into talk, somehow or other, with a very agreeable, gentleman-like fellow, who asked me if I'd only just come to Malta, and all that sort of thing—you know the introductory style of action—till we got quite good friends, and he told me he was living outside this wretched little hole at the Casa di Fiori, and said—wasn't it civil of him?—said he should be very happy to see me if I'd call any time. He gave me his card—Lord Adolphus Fitzhervey—and a man with him called him 'Dolph.' As good luck had it, my weed went out just while we were talking, and Fitzhervey was monstrously pleasant, searched all over him for a fusee, couldn't find one, and asked me to go up with him to the Casa di Fiori and get a light. Of course

I did, and he and I and Guatamara had some sherbet and a smoke together, and then he introduced me to the Marchioness St. Julian, his sister—by Jove! such a magnificent woman, Simon, *you* never saw one like her, I'll wager. She was uncommonly agreeable, too, and *such* a smile, my boy! She seemed to like me wonderfully—not rare that, though, you'll say—and asked me to go and take coffee there to-night, after mess, and bring one of my chums with me; and as I like to show you life, young one, and your taste wants improving after Aunt Minerva, you may come, if you like. Hallo! there's Conran. I say, don't tell *him.* I don't want any poaching on my manor."

Conran came in at that minute; he was then a Brevet-Major and Captain in Ours, and one of the older men who spoilt Little Grand in one way, as much as the women did in another. He was a fine, powerful fellow, with eyes like an eagle's and pluck like a lion's; he had a grave look, and had been of late more silent and self-reticent than the other roystering, débonnair, light-hearted "Dare Devils;" but though, perhaps, tired of the wild escapades which reputation had once attributed to him, was always the most lenient to the boy's monkey tricks, and always the one to whom he went if his larks had cost him too dear, or if he was in a scrape from which he saw no exit. Conran had recently come in for a good deal of money, and there were few bright eyes in Malta that would not have smiled kindly on him; but he did not care much for any of them. There was some talk of a love affair before he went to India, that was the cause of his hard-heartedness, though I must say he did not look much like a victim to the *grande passion*, in my ideas, which were drawn from valentines and odes in the "Woman, thou fond and fair deceiver" style; in love that turned its collars down and let its hair go uncut and refused to eat, and recovered with a rapidity proportionate to its ostentation; and I did not know that, if a man has lost his treasure, he *may* mourn it so deeply that he may refuse to run about like Harpagon, crying for his *cassette* to an audience that only laughs at his miseries.

"Well, young ones," said Conran, as he came in and threw down his cap and whip, "here you are, spending your hours in pipes and bad wine. What a blessing it is to have a palate that isn't *blasé*, and that will swallow all wine just because it *is* wine! That South African goes down with better relish, Little Grand, than you'll find in Château Margaux ten years hence. As soon as one begins to want touching up with olives, one's real gusto is gone."

"Hang olives, sir! they're beastly," said Little Grand; "and I don't care who pretends they're not. Olives are like sermons and wives, everybody makes a wry face, and would rather be excused 'em, Major, but it's the custom to call 'em good things, and so men bolt 'em in complaisance, and while they hate the salt-water flavour, descant on the delicious rose taste."

"Quite true, Little Grand! but one takes olives to enhance the wine; and so, perhaps other men's sermons make one enjoy one's racier novel, and other men's wives make one appreciate one's liberty still better. Don't abuse olives; you'll want them figuratively and literally before you've done either drinking or living!"

"Oh! confound it, Major," cried Little Grand, "I do hope and trust a spent ball may have the kindness to double me up and finish me off before then!"

"You're not philosophic, my boy."

"Thank Heaven, no!" ejaculated Little Grand, piously. "I've an uncle, a very great philosopher, beats all the sages hollow, from Bion to Buckle, and writes in the Metaphysical Quarterly, but I'll be shot if he don't spend so much time in trying to puzzle out what life is, that all his has slipped away without his having *lived* one bit. When I was staying with him one Christmas, be began boring me with a frightful theory on the non-existence of matter. I couldn't stand that, so I cut him short, and set him down to the luncheon-table; and while he was full swing with a Strasbourg pâté and Comet hock, I stopped him and asked him if, with them in his mouth, he believed in matter or not? He was shut up, of course; bless your soul those theorists always are, if you're down upon 'em with a little fact!"

"Such as a Strasbourg pâté?—that *is* an unanswerable argument with most men, I believe," said Conran, who liked to hear the boy chatter. "What are you going to do with yourself to-night, Grand?"

"I am going to—ar—hum—to a friend of mine," said Little Grand, less glibly than usual.

"Very well; I only asked, because I would have taken you to Mrs. Fortescue's with me; they're having some acting proverbs (horrible exertion in this oven of a place, with the thermometer at a hundred and twenty degrees); but if you've better sport it's no matter. Take care what friends you make, though Grand; you'll find some Maltese acquaintances very costly."

"Thank you. I should say I can take care of myself," replied Little Grand, with immeasurable scorn and dignity.

Conran laughed, struck him across the shoulders with his whip, stroked his own moustaches, and went out again, whistling one of Verdi's airs.

"I don't want him bothering, you know," explained Little Grand; "she's such a deuced magnificent woman!"

She was a magnificent woman, this Eudoxia Adelaida, Marchioness St. Julian; and proud enough Little Grand and I felt when we had that soft, jewelled hand held out to us, and that bewitching smile beamed upon us, and that joyous presence dazzling in our eyes, as we sat in the drawing-room of that Casa di Fiori. She was about thirty-five, I should say (boys always worship those who might have been school-fellows of their mothers), tall and stately, and imposing, with the most beautiful pink and white skin, with a fine set of teeth, raven hair, and eyes tinted most exquisitely. Oh! she was magnificent, our Marchioness St Julian! Into what unutterable insignificance, what miserable washed-out shadows sank Stars and Garters' lady, and the Mitchell girls, and all the belles of La Valetta, whom we hadn't thought so very bad looking before.

There was a young creature sitting a little out of the radiance of light, reading; but we had no eyes for anybody except the Marchioness St. Julian. We were in such high society, too; there was her brother, Lord Adolphus, and his bosom Pylades, the Baron Guatamara; and there was a big fellow, with hooked nose and very curly hair, who was introduced to us as the Prince of Orangia Magnolia; and a little wiry fellow, with bits of red and blue ribbon, and a star or two in his button-hole, who was M. le Duc de Saint-Jeu. We were quite dazzled with the coruscations of so much aristocracy, especially when they talked across to each other—so familiarly, too—of Johnnie (that was Lord Russell), and Pam, and "old Buck" (my godfather, Buckingham, Lord Adolphus explained to us), and Montpensier and old Joinville; and chatted of when they dined at the Tuileries, and stayed at Compiégne, and hunted at Belvoir, and spent Christmas at Holcombe or Longleat. We were in such high society! How contemptible appeared Mrs. Maberly's and the Fortescue's soirées; how infinitesimally small grew Charlie Ruthven, and Harry Villiers, and Gray and Albany, and all the other young fellows who thought it such great guns to be *au mieux* with little Graziella, or invited to Sir George Dashaway's. *We* were a cut above those things now—rather!

That splendid Marchioness! There was a head for a coronet, if you like! And how benign she was! Grand sat on the couch beside her, and I on an ottoman on her left, and she leaned back in her magnificent toilette, flirting her fan like a Castilian, and flashing upon us her superb eyes from behind it; not speaking very much, but showing her white teeth in scores of heavenly smiles, till Little Grand, the *blasé* man of seventeen, and I the raw Moses of private tutelage, both felt that we had never come across anything like this; never, in fact, seen a woman worth a glance before.

She listened to us—or rather to him, I was too awestruck to advance much beyond monosyllables—and laughed at him, and smiled encouragingly on my *gaucherie* (and when a boy is *gauche*, how ready he is to worship such a helping hand!), and beamed upon us both with an effulgence compared with which the radiance of Helen, Galatea, Œnone, Messalina, Laïs, and all the legendary beauties one reads about, must have been what the railway nightlamps that *never* burn are to the prismatic luminaries of Cremorne. They were all uncommonly pleasant, all except the girl who was reading, whom they introduced as the Signorina da' Guari, a Tuscan, and daughter to Orangia Magnolia, with one of those marvellously beautiful faces that one sees in the most splendid painters' models of the Campagna, who never lifted her head scarcely, though Guatamara and Saint-Jeu did their best to make her. But all the others were wonderfully agreeable, and quite *fête'd* Little Grand and me, at which, they being more than double our age, and seemingly at home alike with Belgrave and Newmarket, the Faubourg and the Pytchley, we felt to grow at least a foot each in the aroma of this Casa di Fiori.

"This is rather stupid, Doxie," began Lord Adolphus, addressing his sister; "not much entertainment for our guests. What do you say to a game of vingt-et-un, eh, Mr. Grandison?"

Little Grand fixed his blue eyes on the Marchioness, and said he should be very happy, but, as for entertainment—*he* wanted no other.

"No compliments, *petit ami*," laughed the Marchioness, with a dainty blow of her fan. "Yes, Dolph, have vingt-et-un, or music, or anything you like. Sing us something, Lucrezia."

The Italian girl thus addressed looked up with a passionate, haughty flush, and answered, with wonderfully little courtesy I considered, "I shall not sing to-night."

"Are you unwell, fairest friend?" asked the Duc de Saint-Jeu, bending his little wiry figure over her.

She shrank away from him, and drew back, a hot colour in her cheeks.

"Signore, I did not address *you*."

The Marchioness looked angry, if those divine eyes could look anything so mortal. However, she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, my dear Lucrezia, we can't make you sing, of course, if you won't. I, for my part, always do any little thing I can to amuse anybody; if I fail, I fail; I have done my best, and my friends will appreciate the effort, if not the result. No, my dear Prince, do not teaze her," said the Marchioness to Orangia Magnolia, who was arguing, I thought, somewhat imperatively for such a well-bred and courtly man, with Lucrezia; "we will have vingt-et-un, and Lucrezia will give us the delight of her voice some other evening, I dare say."

We had vingt-et-un; the Marchioness would not play, but she sat in her rose velvet arm-chair, just behind Little Grand, putting in pretty little speeches, and questions and bagatelles, and calling attention to the gambols of her darling greyhound Cupidon, and tapping Little Grand with her fan, till, I believe, he neither knew how the game went, nor what money he lost; and I, gazing at her, and cursing him for his facile tongue, never noticed my naturels, couldn't have said what the maximum was if you had paid me for it, and might, for anything I knew to the contrary, have been seeing my life slip away with each card as Balzac's hero with the Peau de Chagrin. Then we had sherbet, and wine, and cognac for those who preferred it; and the Marchioness gave us permission to smoke, and took a dainty hookah with an amber mouthpiece for her own use (divine she did look, too, with that hookah between her ruby lips!); and the smoke, and the cognac, and the smiles, unloosed our tongues, and we spake like very great donkeys, I dare say, but I'm sure with not a tenth part the wisdom that Balaam's ass developed in his brief and pithy conversation.

However great the bosh we talked, though, we found very lenient auditors. Fitzhervey and Guatamara laughed at all our witticisms; the Prince of Orangia Magnolia joined in with a "Per Baccho!" and a "Bravo!" and little Saint-Jeu wheezed, and gave a faint echo of "Mon Dieu!" and "Très bien, très bien, vraiment!" and the Marchioness St. Julian laughed too, and joined in our nonsense, and, what was much more, bent a willing ear to our compliments, no matter how florid; and Saint-Jeu told us a story or two, more amusing than *comme il faut*, at which the Marchioness tried to look grave, and *did* look shocked, but laughed for all that behind her fan; and Lucrezia da' Guari sat in shadow, as still and as silent as the Parian Euphrosyne on the console, though her passionate eyes and expressive face looked the very antipodes of silence and statuetteism, as she flashed half-shy, half-scornful, looks upon us.

If the first part of the evening had been delightful, this was something like Paradise! It was such high society! and with just dash enough of Mabille and coulisses laisser-aller to give it piquancy. How different was the pleasantry and freedom of these *real* aristos, after the humdrum dinners and horrid bores of dances that those snobs of Maberlys, and Fortescues, and Mitchells, made believe to call Society!

What with the wine, and the smoke, and the smiles, I wasn't quite clear as to whether I saw twenty horses' heads or one when I was fairly into saddle, and riding back to the town, just as the first dawn was rising, Aphrodite-like, from the far blue waves of the Mediterranean. Little Grand was better seasoned, but even he was dizzy with the parting words of the Marchioness, which had softly breathed the delicious passport, "Come to-morrow."

"By Jupiter!" swore Little Grand, obliged to give relief to his feelings—"by Jupiter, Simon! did you ever see such a glorious, enchanting, divine, delicious, adorable creature? Faugh! who could look at those Mitchell girls after her? Such eyes! such a smile! such a figure! Talk of a coronet! no imperial crown would be half good enough for her! And how pleasant those fellows are! I like that little chaffy chap, the Duke; what a slap-up story that was about the bal de l'Opéra. And Fitzhervey, too; there's something uncommonly thorough-bred about him, ain't there? And Guatamara's an immensely jolly fellow. Ah, my boy! that's something like society; all the ease and freedom of real rank; no nonsense about them, as there is about snobs. I say, what wouldn't the other fellows give to be in our luck? I think even Conran would warm up about her. But, Simon, she's deucedly taken with me—she is, upon my word; and she knows how to show it to you, too! By George! one could die for a woman like that—eh?"

"Die!" I echoed, while my horse stumbled along up the hilly road, and I swayed forward, pretty nearly over his head, while poetry rushed to my lips, and electric sparks danced before my eyes:

'To die for those we love! oh, there is power
In the true heart, and pride, and joy, for this.
It is to live without the vanished light
That strength is needed!'"

"But I'll be shot if it shall be vanished light," returned Little Grand; "it don't look much like it yet. The light's only just lit, 'tisn't likely it's going out again directly; but she's a stunner! and——"

"A stunner!" I shouted; "she's much more than that—she's an angel, and I'll be much obliged to you to call her by her right name, sir. She's a beautiful, noble, loving woman; the most perfect of all Nature's masterworks. She is divine, sir, and you and I are not worthy merely to kiss the hem of her garment."

"Ain't we though? I don't care much about kissing her dress; it's silk, and I don't know that I should derive much pleasure from pressing my lips on its texture; but her cheek——

> 'Her cheek is like the Catherine pear,
> The side that's next the sun!'"

I shouted, as my horse went down in a rut. "She's like Venus rising from the sea-shell; she's like Aurora, when she came down on the first ray of the dawn to Tithonus; she's like Briseis——"

"Bother classics! she's like herself, and beats 'em all hollow. She's the finest creature ever seen on earth, and I should like to see the man who'd dare to say she wasn't. And—I say, Simon—*how much did you lose to-night?*"

From sublimest heights I tumbled straight to bathos. The cold water of Grand's query quenched my poetry, extinguished my electric lights, and sobered me like a douche bath.

"I don't know," I answered, with a sense of awe and horror stealing over me; "but I had a pony in my waistcoat-pocket that the governor had just sent me; Guatamara changed it for me, and—*I've only sixpence left!*"

"Old boy," said Little Grand to me, the next morning, after early parade, "come in my room, and let's make up some despatches to the governors. You see," he continued, five minutes after—"you see, we're both of us pretty well cleared out; I've only got half a pony, and you haven't a couple ot fivers left. Now you know they evidently play rather high at the Casa di Fiori; do everything *en prince*, like nobs who've Barclay's at their back; and one mustn't hang fire; horrid shabby that would look. Besides, fancy seeming mean before *her!* So I've been thinking that, though governors are a screwy lot generally, if we put it to 'em clearly the sort of set we've got into, and show 'em that we can't help, now that we are at Rome, doing as the Romans do, I should say they could hardly help bleeding a little—eh? Now, listen how I've put it. My old boy has a weakness for titles; he married my mother on the relationship to Viscount Twaddles (who doesn't know of her existence, but who does to talk about as 'our cousin') and he'd eat up miles of dirt for a chance of coming to a strawberry-leaf; so I think this will touch him up beautifully. Listen! ain't I sublimely respectful? 'I'm sure, my dear father, you will be delighted to learn, that by wonderful luck, or rather I ought to say Providence, I have fallen on my feet in Malta, and got introduced to the very highest' (wait! let me stick a dash under very)—'the *very* highest society here. They are quite tip-top. To show you what style, I need only mention Lord A. Fitzhervey, the Baron Guatamara, and the Marchioness St. Julian, as among my kindest friends. They have been yachting in the Levant, and are now staying in Malta: they are all most kind to me; and I know you will appreciate the intellectual advantages that such contact must afford me; at the same time you will understand that I can hardly enter such circles as a snob, and you will wish your son to comport himself as a gentleman; but gentlemanising comes uncommon dear, I can tell you, with all the care in the world: and if you *could* let me have another couple of hundred, I should vote you'—a what, Simon?—'an out-and-out brick' is the sensible style, but I suppose 'the best and kindest of parents' is the filial dodge, eh? There! 'With fond love to mamma and Florie, ever your affectionate son, COSMO GRANDISON.' Bravo! that's prime; that'll bring the yellows down, I take it. Here, old fellow, copy it to your governor; you couldn't have a more stunning effusion—short and to the purpose, as cabinet councils ought to be and ain't. Fire away, my juvenile."

I did fire away! only I, of a more impressionable and poetic nature than Little Grand, gave a certain vent to my feelings in expatiating on the beauty, grace, condescension, &c. &c., of the Marchioness to my mother; I did *not* mention the grivois stories, the brandy, and the hookah: I was quite sure they were the sign of that delicious ease and disregard of snobbish etiquette and convenances peculiar to the "Upper Ten," but I thought the poor people at home, in vicarage seclusion, would be too out of the world to fully appreciate such revelations of our *crême de la crême*; besides, my governor had James's own detestation of the divine weed, and considered that men who "made chimneys of their mouths" might just as well have the mark of the Beast at once.

Little Grand and I were hard-up for cash, and *en attendant* the governors' replies and remittances, we had recourse to the tender mercies and leather bags of napoleons, ducats, florins, and doubloons of a certain Spanish Jew, one Balthazar Miraflores, a shrivelled-skinned, wheezing old cove, who was "most happy to lent anytink to his tear young shentlesmen, but, by Got! he was as poor as Job, he was indeed!" Whether Job ever lent money out on interest or not, I can't say; perhaps he did, as in the finish he ended with having quadrupled his cattle and lands, and all his goods—a knack usurers preserve in full force to this day; but all I can say is, that if he was not poorer than Mr. Miraflores, he was not much to be pitied, for he, miserly old shark, lived in his dark, dirty hole, like a crocodile embedded in Nile mud, and crushed the bones of all unwary adventurers who came within range of his great bristling jaws.

Money, however, Little Grand and I got out of him in plenty, only for a little bit of paper in exchange; and at that time we didn't know that though the paper tax would be repealed at last, there would remain, as long as youths are green and old birds cunning, a heavy and bitter tax on certain bits of paper to which one's hand is put, which Mr. Gladstone, though he achieve the herculean task of making draymen take kindly to vin ordinaire, and the popping of champagne corks a familiar sound by cottage-hearths, will never be able to include in his budgets to come, among the Taxes that are Repealed!

Well, we had our money from old Balthazar that morning, and we played with it again that night up at the Casa di Fiori. Loo this time, by way of change. Saint-Jeu said he always thought it well to change your game as you change your loves: constancy, whether to cards or women, was most fatiguing. We liked Saint-Jeu very much, we thought him such a funny fellow. They said they did not care to play much—of course they didn't, when Guatamara had had écarté with the Grand-Duke of Chaffsandlarkstein at half a million a side, and Lord Dolph had broken the bank at Homburg "just for fun—no fun to old Blanc, who farms it though, you know." But the Marchioness, who was doubly gracious that night, told them they must play, because it amused her *chers petits amis.* Besides, she said, in her pretty, imperious way she liked to see it—it amused her. After that, of course, there was no more hesitation: down we sat, and young Heavystone with us.

The evening before we had happened to mention him, said he was a fellow of no end of tin, though as stupid an owl as ever spelt his own name wrong when he passed a military examination, and the Marchioness, recalling the name, said she remembered his father, and asked us to bring him to see her; which we did, fearing no rival in "old Heavy."

So down we three sat, and had the evening before over again, with the cards, and the smiles, and wiles of our divinity, and Saint-Jeu's stories and Fitzhervey's cognac and cigars; with this difference, that we found loo more exciting than vingt-et-un. They played it so fast, too, it was like a breathless heat for the Goodwood Cup, and the Marchioness watched it, leaning alternately over Grand's, and Heavy's, and my chair, and saying, with such naïve delight, "Oh, do take miss, Cosmo; I would risk it if I were you, Mr. Heavystone; *pray* don't let my naughty brother win everything," that I'd have defied the stiffest of the Stagyrites or the chilliest of Calvinists to have kept their head cool with that syren voice in their ear.

And La Lucrezia sat, as she had sat the night before, by the open window, still and silent, the Cape jasmines and Southern creepers framing her in a soft moonlight picture, contrast enough to the brilliantly lighted room, echoing with laughter at Saint-Jeu's stories, perfumed with Cubas and narghilés, and shrining the magnificent, full-bloom, jewelled beauty of our Marchioness St. Julian, with which we were as rapidly, as madly, as unreasoningly, and as sentimentally in love as any boys of seventeen or eighteen ever could be. What greater latitude, you will exclaim, recalling certain buried-away episodes of *your* hobbedehoyism, when you addressed Latin distichs to that hazel-eyed Hebe who presided over oyster patties and water ices at the pastrycook's in Eton; or ruined your governor's young plantations at cutting the name of Adeliza Mary, your couzin, at this day a portly person in velvet and point, whom you can now call, with a thanksgiving in the stead of the olden tremor, Mrs. Hector M'Cutchin? Yes, we were in love in a couple of evenings, Little Grand vehemently and unpoetically, I shyly and sentimentally, according to our temperaments, and as the fair Emily stirred feud between the two Noble Kinsmen, so the Marchioness St. Julian began to sow seeds of jealousy and detestation between us, sworn allies as we were. But *"le véritable amant ne connait point d'amis,"* and as soon as we began to grow jealous of each other, Little Grand could have kicked me to the devil, and I could have kicked *him*, with the greatest pleasure in life.

But I was shy, Little Grand was blessed with all the audacity imaginable; the consequence was, that when our horses came round, and the Maltese who acted as cherub was going to close the gates of Paradise upon us, he managed to slip into the Marchioness's boudoir to get a *tête-à-tête* farewell, while I strode up and down the verandah, not heeding Saint-Jeu, who was telling a tale, to which, in any other saner moments, I should have listened greedily, but longing to execute on Little Grand some fierce and terrible vengeance, to which the vendetta should be baby's play. Saint-Jeu left me to put his arm over Heavy's shoulder, and tell him if ever he came to Paris he should be transported to receive him at the Hôtel de Millefleurs, and present him at the Tuileries; and I stood swearing to myself, and breaking off sprays of the verandah creepers, when I heard somebody say, very softly and low,

"Signore, come here a moment."

It was that sweetly pretty mute whom we had barely noticed, absorbed as we were in the worship of our maturer idol, leaning out of the window, her cheeks flushed, her lips parted, her eyes sad and anxious. Of course I went to her, surprised at her waking up so suddenly to any interest in me. She put her hand on my coat-sleeve, and drew me down towards her.

"Listen to me a moment. I hardly know how to warn you, and yet I must. I cannot sit quietly by and see you and your young friends being deceived as so many have been before you. Do not come here again—do not——"

"Figlia mia! are you not afraid of the night air?" said the Prince of Orangia Magnolia, just behind us.

His words were kind, but there was a nasty glitter in his eyes. Lucrezia answered him in passionate Italian—of which I had no knowledge—with such fire in her eyes, such haughty gesticulation, and such a torrent of words, that I really began to think, pretty soft little dear as she looked, that she must positively be a trifle out of her mind, her silence before, and her queer speech to me, seemed such odd behaviour for a young lady in such high society. She was turning to me again when Little Grand came out into the verandah, looking flushed, proud, and self-complaisant, as such a winner and slayer of women would do. My hand clenched on the jasmine, I thirsted to spring on him as he stood there with his provoking, self-contented smile, and his confounded coxcombical air, and his cursed fair curls—*my* hair was dust-coloured and as rebellious as porcupine-quills—and wash out in his blood or mine—A touch of a soft hand thrilled through my every nerve and fibre; the Marchioness was there, and signed me to her. Lucrezia, Little Grand, and all the rest of the universe vanished from my mind at the lightning of that angel smile and the rustle of that moire-antique dress. She beckoned me to her into the empty drawing-room.

"Augustus" (I never thought my name could sound so sweet before), "tell me, what was my niece Lucrezia saying to you just now?"

Now I had a sad habit of telling the truth; it was an out-of-the-world custom taught me, among other old-fashioned things, at home, though I soon found how inconvenient a *bêtise* modern society considers it; and I blurted the truth out here, not distinctly or gracefully though, as Little Grand would have done, for I was in that state of exaltation ordinarily expressed as not knowing whether one is standing in one's Wellingtons or not.

The Marchioness sighed.

"Ah, did she say that? Poor dear girl! She dislikes me so much, it is quite an hallucination, and yet, O Augustus, I have been to her like an elder sister, like a mother. Imagine how it grieves me," and the Marchioness shed some tears—pearls of price, thought I, worthy to drop from angel eyes—"it is a bitter sorrow to me, but poor darling! she is not responsible."

She touched her veiny temple significantly as she spoke, and I understood, and felt tremendously shocked at it, that the young, fair Italian girl was a fierce and cruel maniac, who had the heart (oh! most extraordinary madness did it seem to me; if *I* had lost my senses I could never have harmed *her!*) to hate, absolutely hate, the noblest, tenderest, most beautiful of women!

"I never alluded to it to any one," continued the Marchioness. "Guatamara and Saint-Jeu, though such intimate friends, are ignorant of it. I would rather have any one think ever so badly of me, than reveal to them the cruel misfortune of my sweet Lucrezia——"

How noble she looked as she spoke!

"But you, Augustus, you," and she smiled upon me till I grew as dizzy as after my first taste of milk-punch, "I have not the courage to let *you* go off with any bad impression of me. I have known you a very little while, it is true—but a few hours, indeed—yet there are affinities of heart and soul which overstep the bounds of time, and, laughing at the chill ties of ordinary custom, make strangers dearer than old friends——"

The room revolved round me, the lights danced up and down, my heart beat like Thor's hammer, and my pulse went as fast as a favourite saving the distance. *She* speaking so to me! My senses whirled round and round like fifty thousand witches on a Walpurgis Night, and down I went on my knees before my magnificent idol, raving away I couldn't tell you what now—the essence of everything I'd had ever read, from Ovid to Alexander Smith. It must have been something frightful to hear, though Heaven knows I meant it earnestly enough. Suddenly I was pulled up with a jerk, as one throws an unbroken colt back on his haunches in the middle of his first start. *I thought I heard a laugh.*

She started up too. "Hush! another time? We may be overheard." And drawing her dress from my hands, which grasped it as agonisingly as a cockney grasps his saddle-bow, holding on for dear life over the Burton or Tedworth country, she stooped kindly over me, and floated away before *I* was recovered from the exquisite delirium of my ecstatic trance.

She loved me! The superb creature loved me! There was not a doubt of it; and how I got back to the barracks that night in my heavenly state of mind I could never have told. All I know is, that Grand and I never spoke a word, by tacit consent, all the way back; that I felt a fiendish delight when I saw his proud triumphant air, and thought how little he guessed, poor fellow!——And that Dream of One Fair Woman was as superior in rapture to the "Dream of Fair Women" as Tokey to the "Fine Fruity Port" that results from damsons and a decoction of sloes!

The next day there was a grand affair in Malta to receive some foreign Prince, whose name I do not remember now, who called on us *en route* to England. Of course all the troops turned out, and there was an inspection of us, and a grand luncheon and dinner, and ball, and all that sort of thing, which a month before I should have considered prime fun, but which now, as it kept me out of my paradise, I thought the most miserable bore that could possibly have chanced.

"I say," said Heavy to me, as I was getting into harness—"I say, don't you wonder Fitzhervey and the Marchioness ain't coming to the palace to-day? One would have thought old Stars and Garters would have been sure to ask them."

"Ask them? I should say so," I returned with immeasurable disdain. "Of course he asked them; but she told me she shouldn't come, last night. She is so tired of such things. She came yachting with Fitzhervey solely to try and have a little quiet. She says people never give her a moment's rest when she is in Paris or London. She was sorry to disappoint Stars and Garters, but I don't think she likes his wife much: she don't consider her good ton."

On which information Heavy lapsed into a state of profoundest awe and wonderment, it having been one of his articles of faith, for the month that we had been in Malta, that the palace people were exalted demigods, whom it was only permissible to worship from a distance, and a very respectful distance too. Heavy had lost some twenty odd pounds the night before—of course we lost, young hands as we were, unaccustomed to the society of that entertaining gentleman Pam—and had grumbled not a little at the loss of his gold bobs. But now I could see that such a contemptibly pecuniary matter was clean gone from his memory, and that he would have thought the world well lost for the honour of playing cards with people who could afford to disappoint old Stars and Garters.

The inspection was over at last; and if any other than Conran had been my senior officer, I should have come off badly, in all probability, for the abominable manner in which I went through my evolutions. The day came to an end somehow or other, though I began to think it never would, the luncheon was ended, the bigwigs were taking their sieste, or otherwise occupied, and I, trusting to my absence not being noticed, tore off as hard as a man can who has Cupid for his Pegasus. With a bouquet as large as a drum-head, clasped round with a bracelet, about which I had many doubts as to the propriety of offering to the possessor of such jewellery as the Marchioness must have, yet on which I thought I might venture after the scene of last night, I was soon on the verandah of the Casa di Fiori, and my natural shyness being stimulated into a distant resemblance of Little Grand's enviable brass, seeing the windows of the drawing-room open, I pushed aside the green venetians and entered noiselessly. The room did not look a quarter so inviting as the night before, though it was left in precisely a similar state. I do not know how it was, but those cards lying about on the floor, those sconces with the wax run down and dripping over them, those emptied caraffes that had diffused an odour not yet dissipated, those tables and velvet couches all *à tort et à travers*, did not look so very inviting after all, and, even to my unsophisticated senses, scarcely seemed fit for a Peeress.

There was nobody in the room, and I walked through it towards the boudoir; from the open door I saw Fitzhervey, Guatamara, and my Marchioness—but oh! what horror unutterable! doing—*que pensez-vous?* Drinking bottled porter! —and drinking bottled porter in a *peignoir* not of the cleanliest, and with raven tresses not of the neatest!

Only fancy! she, that divine, *spirituelle* creature, who had talked but a few hours before of the affinity of souls, to have come down like any ordinary woman, to Guinness's stout, and a checked dressing-gown and unbrushed locks! To find your prophet without his silver veil, or your Leila dead drowned in a sack, or your Guinevere flown over with Sir Lancelot to Boulogne, or your long-esteemed Griselda gone off with your cockaded Jeames, is nothing to the torture, the unutterable anguish, of seeing your angel, your divinity, your bright particular star, your hallowed Arabian rose, come down to— Bottled Porter! Do not talk to me of Doré, sir, or of Mr. Martin's pictures; their horrors dwindle into insignificance compared with the horror of finding an intimate liaison between one's first love and Bottled Porter!

In my first dim, unutterable anguish, I should have turned and fled; but my syren's voice had not lost all its power, despite the stout and dirty dressing-gown, for she *was* a very handsome woman, and could stand such things as well as anybody. She came towards me, with her softest smile, glancing at the bracelet on the bouquet, apologising slightly for her négligé:—"I am so indolent. I only dress for those I care to please—and I never hoped to see *you* to-day." In short, magnetising me over again, and smoothing down my outraged sensibilities, till I ended by becoming almost blind (*quite* I could not manage) to the checked *robe de chambre* and the unbrushed bandeaux, by offering her my braceleted bouquet, which was very graciously accepted, and even by sharing the atrocious London porter, "that horrid stuff," she called it, "how I hate it! but it is the only thing Sir Benjamin Brodie allows me, I am so very delicate, you know, my sensibilities so frightfully acute!"

I had not twenty minutes to stay, having to be back at the barracks, or risk a reprimand, which, happily, the checked *peignoir* had cooled me sufficiently to enable me to recollect. So I took my farewell——one not unlike Medora's and Conran's, Fitzhervey and Guatamara having kindly withdrawn as soon as the bottled porter was finished—and I went out of the house in a very blissful state, despite Guinness and the unwelcome demi-toilette, which did not accord with Eugène Sue's and the Parlour Library's description of the general getting-up and stunning appearance of heroines and peeresses "reclining, in robes of cloud-like tissue and folds of the richest lace, on a cabriole couch of amber velvet, while the air was filled with the voluptuous perfume of the flower-children of the South, and music from unseen choristers lulled the senses with its divinest harmony," &c., &c., &c.

Bottled porter and a checked dressing-gown! Say what you like, sirs, it takes a very strong passion to overcome *those.* I have heard men ascribe the waning of their affections after the honeymoon to the constant sight of their wives—whom before they had only seen making papa's coffee with an angelic air and a toilette *tirée à quatre épingles*—everlastingly coming down too late for breakfast in a dressing-gown; and, upon my soul, if ever I marry, which heaven in pitiful mercy forefend! and my wife make her appearance in one of those confounded *peignoirs*, I will give that much-run-after and deeply-to-be-pitied public character, the Divorce Judge, some more work to do—I will upon my honour.

However, the *peignoir* had not iced me enough that time to prevent my tumbling out of the house in as delicious an ecstasy as if I had been eating some of Monte Cristo's "hatchis." As I went out, not looking before me, I came bang against the chest of somebody else, who, not admiring the rencontre, hit my cap over my eyes, and exclaimed, in not the most courtly manner you will acknowledge, "You cursed owl, take that, then! What are you doing here, I should like to know?"

"Confound your impudence!" I retorted, as soon as my ocular powers were restored, and I saw the blue eyes, fair curls, and smart figure of my ancient Iolaüs, now my bitterest foe—"confound your impertinence! what are *you* doing here? you mean."

"Take care, and don't ask questions about what doesn't concern you," returned Little Grand, with a laugh—a most irritating laugh. There are times when such cachinnations sting one's ears more than a volley of oaths. "Go home and mind your own business, my chicken. You are a green bird, and nobody minds you; but still you'll find it as well not to come poaching on other men's manors."

"Other men's manors! Mine, if you please," I shouted, so mad with him I could have floored him where he stood.

"Phew!" laughed Little Grand, screwing up his lips into a contemptuous whistle, "you've been drinking too much Bass, my daisy; 'tisn't good for young heads—can't stand it. Go home, innocent."

The insult, the disdainful tone, froze my blood. My heart swelled with a sense of outraged dignity and injured manhood. With a conviction of my immeasurable superiority of position, as the beloved of that divine creature, I emancipated myself from the certain sort of slavery I was generally in to Little Grand, and spoke as I conceived it to be the habit of gentlemen whose honour had been wounded to speak.

"Mr. Grandison, you will pay for this insult. I shall expect satisfaction."

Little Grand laughed again—absolutely grinned, the audacious young imp—and he twelve months younger than I, too!

"Certainly, sir. If you wish to be made a target of, I shall be delighted to oblige you. I can't keep ladies waiting. It is always Place aux dames! with me; so, for the present, good morning!"

And off went the young coxcomb into the Casa di Fiori, and I, only consoled by the reflection of the different reception he would receive to what mine had been (*he* had a braceleted bouquet, too, the young pretentious puppy!), started off again, assuaging my lacerated feelings with the delicious word of Satisfaction. I felt myself immeasurably raised above the heads of every other man in Malta—a perfect hero of romance; in fact, fit to figure in my beloved Alexandre's most highly-wrought yellow-papered *roman*, with a duel on my hands, and the love of a magnificent creature like my Eudoxia Adelaida. She had become Eudoxia Adelaida to me now, and I had forgiven, if not forgotten, the dirty dressing-gown; the bottled porter lay, of course, at Brodie's door. If he would condemn spiritual forms of life and light to the common realistic aliments of horrible barmaids and draymen, she could not help it, nor I either. If angels come down to earth, and are separated from their natural nourishment of manna and nectar, they must take what they can get, even though it be so coarse and sublunary a thing as Guinness's XXX, must they not, sir? Yes, I felt very *exalté* with my affair of honour and my affair of the heart, Little Grand for my foe, and my Marchioness for a love. I never stopped to remember that I might be smashing with frightful recklessness the Sixth and the Seventh Commandments. If Little Grand got shot, he must thank himself; he should not have insulted me; and if there was a Marquis St. Julian, why—I pitied him, poor fellow! that was all.

Full of these sublime sensations—grown at least three feet in my varnished boots—I lounged into the ball-room, feeling supreme pity for ensigns who were chattering round the door, admiring those poor, pale garrison girls. *They* had not a duel and a Marchioness: *they* did not know what beauty meant—what life was!

I did not dance—I was above that sort of thing now—there was not a woman worth the trouble in the room; and about the second waltz I saw my would-be rival talking to Ruthven, a fellow in Ours. Little Grand did not look glum or dispirited, as he ought to have done after the interview he must have had; but probably that was the boy's brass. He would never look beaten if you had hit him till he was black and blue. Presently Ruthven came up to me. He was not over-used to his business, for he began the opening chapter in rather schoolboy fashion.

"Hallo, Gus! so you and Little Grand have been falling out. Why don't you settle it with a little mill? A vast deal better than pistols, Duels always seems to me no fun. Two men stand up like fools, and——"

"Mr. Ruthven," said I, very haughtily, "if your principal desires to apologise——"

"Apologise! Bless your soul, no! But——"

"Then," said I, cutting him uncommonly short, indeed, "you can have no necessity to address yourself to me, and I beg to refer you to my friend and second, Mr. Heavystone."

Wherewith I bowed, turned on my heel, and left him.

I did not sleep that night, though I tried hard, because I thought it the correct thing for heroes to sleep sweetly till the clock strikes the hour of their duel, execution, &c., or whatever it may hap. Egmont slept, Argyle slept, Philippe Egalité, scores of them, but I could not. Not that I funked it, thank Heaven—I never had a touch of that—but because I was in such a delicious state of excitement, self-admiration, and heroism, which had not cooled when I found myself walking to the appointed place by the beach with poor old Heavy, who was intensely impressed by being charged with about five quires of the best cream-laid, to be given to the Marchioness in case I fell. Little Grand and Ruthven came on the ground at almost the same moment, Little Grand eminently jaunty and most *confoundedly* handsome. We took off our caps with distant ceremony; the Castilian hidalgos were never more stately; but, then, what Knights of the Round Table ever splintered spears for such a woman?

The paces were measured, the pistols taken out of their case. We were just placed, and Ruthven, with a handkerchief in his hand, had just enumerated, in awful accents, "One! two!"—the "three!" yet hovered on his lips, when we heard a laugh—the third laugh that had chilled my blood in twenty-four hours. Somebody's hand was laid on Little Grand's shoulder, and Conran's voice interrupted the whole thing.

"Hollo, young ones! what farce is this?"

"Farce, sir!" retorted Little Grand, hotly—"farce? It is no farce. It is an affair of honour, and——"

"Don't make me laugh, my dear boy," smiled Conran; "it is much too warm for such an exertion. Pray, why are you and your once sworn friend making popinjays of each other?"

"Mr. Grandison has grossly insulted me," I began, "and I demand satisfaction. I will not stir from the ground without it, and——"

"You *shan't*," shouted Little Grand. "Do you dare to pretend I want to funk, you little contemptible——"

Though it was too warm, Conran went off into a fit of laughter.

I dare say our sublimity had a comic touch in it of which we never dreamt. "My dear boys, pray don't, it is too fatiguing. Come, Grand, what is it all about?"

"I deny your right to question me, Major," retorted Little Grand in a fury. "What have you to do with it? I mean to punish that young owl yonder—who didn't know how to drink anything but milk-and-water, didn't know how to say bo! to a goose, till I taught him—for very abominable impertinence, and I'll——"

"My impertinence! I like that!" I shouted. "It is your unwarrantable, overbearing self-conceit, that makes you the laughing-stock of all the mess, which——"

"Silence!" said Conran's still stern voice, which subdued us into involutary respect. "No more of this nonsense! Put up those pistols, Ruthven. You are two hot-headed, silly boys, who don't know for what you are quarrelling. Live a few years longer, and you won't be so eager to get into hot water, and put cartridges into your best friends. No, I shall not hear any more about it. If you do not instantly give me your words of honour not to attempt to repeat this folly, as your senior officer I shall put you under arrest for six weeks."

O Alexander Dumas!—O Monte Christo!—O heroes of yellow paper and pluck invincible! I ask pardon of your shades; I must record the fact, lowering and melancholy as it is, that before our senior officer our heroisim melted like Vanilla ice in the sun, our glories tumbled to the ground like twelfth-cake ornaments under children's fingers, and before the threat of arrest the lions lay down like lambs.

Conran sent us back, humbled, sulky, and crestfallen, and resumed his solitary patrol upon the beach, where, before the sun was fairly up, he was having a shot at curlews. But if he was a little stern, he was no less kind-hearted; and in the afternoon of that day, while he lay, after his siesta, smoking on his little bed, I unburdened myself to him. He did not laugh at me, though I saw a quizzical smile under his black moustaches.

"What is your divinity's name?" he asked, when I had finished.

"Eudoxia Adelaida, Marchioness St. Julian."

"The Marchioness St. Julian! .Oh!"

"Do you know her?" I inquired, somewhat perplexed by his tone.

He smiled straight out this time.

"I don't know *her*, but there are a good many Peeresses in Malta and Gibraltar, and along the line of the Pacific, as my brother Ned, in the *Belisarius*, will tell you. I could count two score such of my acquaintance off at this minute."

I wondered what he meant. I dare say he knew all the Peerage; but that had nothing to do with me, and I thought it strange that all the Duchesses, and Countesses, and Baronesses should quit their country-seats and town-houses to locate themselves along the line of the Pacific.

"She's a fine woman, St. John?" he went on.

"Fine!" I reiterated, bursting into a panegyric, with which I won't bore you as I bored him.

"Well, you're going there to-night, you say; take me with you, and we'll see what I think of your Marchioness."

I looked at his fine figure and features, recalled certain tales of his conquests, remembered that he knew French, Italian, German, and Spanish; but, not being very able to refuse, acquiesced with a reluctance I could not entirely conceal. Conran, however, did not perceive it, and after mess took his cap, and went with me to the Casa di Fiori.

The rooms were all right again, my Marchioness was *en grande tenue*, amber silk, black lace, diamonds, and all that sort of style. Fitzhervey and the other men were in evening dress, drinking coffee; there was not a trace of bottled porter anywhere, and it was all very brilliant and presentable. The Marchioness St. Julian rose with the warmest effusion, her dazzling white teeth showing in the sunniest of smiles, and both hands outstretched.

"Augustus, *bien aimé*, you are rather——"

"Late," I suppose she was going to say, but she stopped dead short, her teeth remained parted in a stereotyped smile, a blankness of dismay came over her luminous eyes. She caught sight of Conran, and I imagined I heard a very low-breathed "Curse the fellow!" from courteous Lord Dolph. Conran came forward, however, as if he did not notice it; there was only that queer smile lurking under his moustaches.

I introduced him to them, and the Marchioness smiled again, and Fitzhervey almost resumed his wonted extreme urbanity. But they were somehow or other wonderfully ill at ease—wonderfully, for people in such high society; and I was ill at ease too, from being only able to attribute Eudoxia Adelaida's evident consternation at the sight of Conran to his having been some time or other an old love of hers. "Ah!" thought I, grinding my teeth, "that comes of loving a woman older than oneself."

The Major, however, seemed the only one who enjoyed himself. The Marchioness was beaming on him graciously, though her ruffled feathers were not quite smoothed down, and he was sitting by her with an intense amusement in his eyes, alternately talking to her about Stars and Garters, which, by her answers, she did not seem to know so very intimately after all, and chatting with Fitzhervey about hunting, who, for a man that had hunted over every country, according to his own account, seemed to confuse Tom Edge with Tom Smith, the Burton with the Tedworth, a bull-finch with an ox-rail, in queer style, under Conran's cross-questioning. We had been in the room about ten minutes, when a voice, rich, low, sweet, rang out from some inner room, singing the glorious "Inflammatus." How strange it sounded in the Casa di Fiori!

Conran started, the dark blood rose over the clear bronze of his cheek. He turned sharply to the Marchioness. "Good Heaven! whose voice is that?"

"My niece's," she answered, staring at him, and touching a hand-bell. "I will ask her to come and sing to us nearer. She has really a lovely voice."

Conran grew pale again, and sat watching the door with the most extraordinary anxiety. Some minutes went by; then Lucrezia entered with the same haughty reserve which her soft young face always wore when with her aunt. It changed, though, when her glance fell on Conran, into the wildest rapture I ever saw on any countenance. He fixed his eyes on her with the look Little Grand says he's seen him wear in a battle—a contemptuous smile quivering on his face.

"Sing us something, Lucrezia dear," began the Marchioness. "You shouldn't be like the nightingales, and give your music only to night and solitude."

Lucrezia seemed not to hear her. She had never taken her eyes off Conran, and she went, as dreamily as that dear little *Amina* in the "Sonnambula," to her seat under the jasmines in the window. For a few minutes Conran, who didn't seem to care two straws what the society in general thought of him, took his leave, to the relief, apparently, of Fitzhervey and Guatamara.

As he went across the verandah—that memorable verandah! —I sitting in dudgeon near the other window, while Fitzhervey was proposing écarté to Heavy, whom we had found there on our entrance, and the Marchioness had vanished into her boudoir for a moment, I saw the Roman girl spring out after him, and catch hold of his arm:

"Victor! Victor! for pity's sake!—I never thought we should meet like this?"

"Nor did I."

"Hush! hush! you will kill me. In mercy, say some kinder words!"

"I can say nothing that it would be courteous to *you to say.*"

I couldn't have been as inflexible, whatever her sins might have been, with her hands clasped on me, and her face raised so close to mine. Lucrezia's voice changed to a piteous wail:

"You love me no longer, then?"

"Love!" said Conran, fiercely—"love! How dare you speak to me of love? I held you to be fond, innocent, true as Heaven: as such, you were dearer to me than life, as dear as honour. I loved you with as deep a passion as ever a man knew—Heaven help me! I love you now! How am I rewarded? By finding you the companion of blackguards, the associate of swindlers, one of the arch-intriguantes who lead on youths to ruin with base smiles and devilish arts. Then you dare talk to me of love!"

With those passionate words he threw her off him. She fell at his feet with a low moan. He either did not hear, or did not heed it; and I, bewildered by what I heard, mechanically went and lifted her from the ground. Lucrezia had not fainted, but she looked so wild, that I believed the Marchioness, and set her down as mad; but then Conran must be mad as well, which seemed too incredible a thing for me to swallow—our cool Major mad!

"Where does he live?" asked Lucrezia of me, in a breathless whisper.

"He? Who?"

"Victor—your officer—Signor Conran."

"Why, he lives in Valetta, of course."

"Can I find him there?"

"I dare say, it you want him."

"Want him! Oh Santa Maria! is not his absence death? Can I find him?"

"Oh yes, I dare say. Anybody will show you Conran's rooms."

"Thank you."

With that, this mysterious young lady left me, and I turned in through the window again. Heavy and the men were playing at lansquenet, that most perilous, rapid, and bewitching of all the resistless Card Circes. There was no Marchioness, and having done it once with impunity, I thought I might do it again, and lifted the amber curtain that divided the boudoir from the drawing-room. What did I behold? Oh! torture unexampled! Oh! fiendish agony! There was Little Grand—self-conceited, insulting, impertinent, abominable, unendurable Little Grand—on the amber satin couch, with the Marchioness leaning her head on his shoulder, and looking up in his thrice-confounded face with her most adorable smile, *my* smile, that had beamed, and, as I thought, beamed only upon me!

If Mephistopheles had been by to tempt me, I would have sold my soul to have wreaked vengeance on them both. Neither saw me, thank Heaven! and I had self-possession enough not to give them the cruel triumph of witnessing my anguish. I withdrew in silence, dropped the curtain, and rushed to bury my wrongs and sorrows in the friendly bosom of the gentle night. It was my first love, and I had made a fool of myself. The two are synonymous.

How I reached the barracks I never knew. All the night long I sat watching the stars out, raving to them of Eudoxia Adelaida, and cursing in plentiful anathemas my late Orestes. How should I bear his impudent grin every mortal night of my life across the mess-table? I tore up into shreds about a ream of paper, inscribed with tender sonnets to my faithless idol. I trampled into fifty thousand shreds a rosette off her dress, for which, fool-like, I had begged the day before. I smashed the looking-glass, which could only show me the image of a pitiful donkey. I called on Heaven to redress my wrongs. Oh! curse it! never was a fellow at once so utterly done for and so utterly done brown!

And in the vicarage, as I learnt afterwards, when my letter was received at home, there was great glorification and pleasure. My mother and the girls were enraptured at the high society darling Gussy was moving in; "but then, you know, mamma, dear Gussy's manners are so gentle, so gentlemanlike, they are sure to please wherever he goes!" Wherewith my mother cried, and dried her eyes, and cried again, over that abominable letter copied from Little Grand's, and smelling of vilest tobacco.

Then entered a rectoress of a neighbouring parish, to whom my mother and the girls related with innocent exultation of my grand friends at Malta; how Lord A. Fitzhervey was my sworn ally, and the Marchioness St. Julian had quite taken me under her wing. And the rectoress, having a son of her own, who was not doing anything so grand at Cambridge, but principally sotting beer at a Cherryhinton public, smiled and was wrathful, and said to her lord at dinner:

"My dear, did you ever hear of a Marchioness St. Julian?"

"No, my love, I believe not—never."

"Is there one in the Peerage?"

"Can't say, my dear. Look in Burke."

So the rectoress got Burke, and closed it, after deliberate inspection, with malignant satisfaction.

"I thought not. How ridiculous those St. Johns are about that ugly boy Augustus. As if Tom were not worth a hundred of him!"

I was too occupied with my own miseries then to think about Conran and Lucrezia, though some time after I heard all about it. It seems that, a year before, Conran was on leave in Rome, and at Rome, loitering about the Campagna one day, he made a chance acquaintance with an Italian girl, by getting some flowers for her she had tried to reach and could not. She was young, enthusiastic, intensely interesting, and had only an old Roman nurse, deaf as a post and purblind with her. The girl was Lucrezia Da' Guari, and Lucrezia was lovely as one of her own myrtle or orange flowers. Somehow or other Conran went there the next day, and the next, and the next, and so on for a good many days, and always found Lucrezia. Now, Conran had at bottom a touch of unstirred romance, and, moreover, his own idea of what sort of woman he could love. Something in this untrained yet winning Campagna flower answered to both. He was old enough to trust his own discernment, and, after a month or two's walks and talks, Conran, one of the proudest men going, offered himself and his name to a Roman girl of whom he knew nothing, except that she seemed to care for him as he had had a fancy to be cared for all his life. It was a deucedly romantic thing—however, he did it. Lucrezia had told him her father was a military officer, but somehow or other this father never came to light, and when he called at their house—or rather rooms—Conran always found him out, which he thought queer, but, on the whole, rather providential, and he set the accident down to a foreigner's roaming habits.

The day Conran had really gone the length of offering to make an unknown Italian his wife, he went for the first time in the evening, to Da' Guari's house. The servant showed him in unannounced to a brightly-lighted chamber, reeking with wine and smoke, where a dozen men were playing trente et quarante at an amateur bank, and two or three others were gathered round what he had believed his own fair and pure Campagna flower. He understood it all; he turned away with a curse upon him. He wanted love and innocence; adventuresses he could have by the score, and he was sick to death of them. From that hour he never saw her again till he met her at the Casa di Fiori.

The next day I went to Conran while he was breakfasting, and unburdened my mind to him. He looked ill and haggard, but he listened to me very kindly, though he spoke of the people at the Casa di Fiori in a hard, brief, curious manner.

"Plenty have been taken in like you, Gus," he said. "I was, years ago in my youth, when I joined the Army. There are scores of such women, as I told you, down the line of the Pacific, and about here; anywhere, in fact, where the army and navy give them fresh pigeons to be gulled. They take titles that sound grand in boys' ears, and fascinate them till they've won all their money, and then——send them to the dogs. Your Marchioness St. Julian's name is Sarah Briggs."

I gave an involuntary shriek. Sarah Briggs finished me. It was the death-stroke, that could never be got over.

"She was a ballet-girl in London," continued Conran; "then, when she was sixteen, married that Fitzhervey, *alias* Briggs, *alias* Smith, *alias* what you please, and set up in her present more lucrative employment with her three or four confederates. Saint-Jeu was expelled from Paris for keeping a hell in the Chaussée d'Antin, Fitzhervey was a leg at Newmarket, Orangia Magnolia a lawyer's clerk, who was had up for forgery, Guatamara is—by another name—a scoundrel of Rome. There is the history of your Maltese Peerage, Gussy. Well, you'll be wider awake next time. Wait, there is somebody at my door. Stay here a moment, I'll come back to you."

Accordingly, I stayed in his bedroom, where I had found him writing, and he went into his sitting-room, of which, from the diminutiveness of his domicile, I commanded a full view, sit where I would. What was my astonishment to see Lucrezia! I went to his bedroom door; it was locked from the outside, so I perforce remained where I was, to, *nolens volens*, witness the finish of last night's interview.

Stern to the last extent and deadly pale, Conran stood, too surprised to speak, and most probably at a loss for words.

Lucrezia came up to him nevertheless with the abandonment of youth and southern blood.

"Victor! Victor! let me speak to you. You shall listen; you shall not judge me unheard."

"Signorina, I have judged you by only too ample evidence."

He had recovered himself now, and was as cool as needs be.

"I deny it. But you love me still?"

"Love you? More shame on me! A laugh, a compliment, a caress, a cashmere, is as much as such women as you are worth. Love becomes ridiculous named in the same breath with you."

She caught hold of his hand and crushed it in both her own.

"Kill me if you will. Death would have no sting from your hand, but never speak such words to *me*."

His voice trembled.

"How can I choose but speak them? You know what I believed you in Italy, and how on that belief I offered you my name—a name never yet stained, never yet held unworthy. I lost you, to find you in society which stamped you for ever.

A lovely fiend, holding raw boys enchained, that your associates might rifle their purses with marked cards and cogged dices. I hoped to have found a diamond, without spot or flaw. I discovered my error too late; it was only glass, which all men were free to pick up and trample on at their pleasure."

He tried to wrench his hand away, but she would not let it go.

"Hush! hush! listen to me first. If you once thought me worthy of your love, you may, surely, now accord me pity. I shall not trouble you long. After this, you need see me no more. I am going back to my old convent. You and the world will soon forget me, but I shall remember you, and pray for you, as dearer than my own soul."

Conran's head was bent down now, and his voice was thick, as he answered briefly,

"Go on."

This scene half consoled me for Eudoxia Adelaida—(I mean, O Heavens, Sarah Briggs!)—it was so exquisitely romantic, and Conran and Lucrezia wouldn't have done at all badly for Monte Cristo and that dear little Haidee. I was fearfully poetic in those days.

"When I met you in Rome," Lucrezia went on, in obedience to his injunction, "two years ago, you remember I had only left my convent and lived with my father but a month or two. I told you he was an officer. I only said what I had been told, and I knew no more than you that he was the keeper of a gambling house."

She shuddered as she paused, and leaned her forehead on Conran's hand. He did not repulse her, and she continued in her broken, simple English:

"The evening you promised me what I should have needed to have been an angel to be worthy of—your love and your name—that very evening when I reached home, my father bade me dress for a soirée he was going to give. I obeyed him, of course. I knew nothing but what he told me, and I went down, to find a dozen young nobles and a few Englishmen drinking and playing on a table covered with green cloth. Some few of them came up to me, but I felt frightened; their looks, their tones, their florid compliments, were so different to yours. But my father kept his eye upon me, and would not let me leave. While they were leaning over my chair, and whispering in my ear, *you* came to the door of the saloon, and I went towards you, and you looked cold and harsh, as I had never seen you before, and put me aside, and turned away without a word. Oh, Victor! Why did you not kill me then? Death would have been kindness. Your Othello was kinder to Desdemona; he slew her—he did not *leave* her. From that hour I never saw you, and from that hour my father persecuted me because I would never join in his schemes, nor enter his vile gaming-rooms. Yet I have lived with him because I could not get away. I have been too carefully watched. We Italians are not free, like your happy English girls. A few weeks ago we were compelled to leave Rome, the young Contino di Firenze had been stilettoed leaving my father's rooms, and he could stay in Italy no longer. We came here, and joined that hateful woman, who calls herself Marchioness St. Julian; and, because she could not bend me to her will, gives out that I am her niece, and mad! I wonder I am *not* mad, Victor. I wish hearts would break, as the romancers make them; but how long one suffers, and lives on! Oh, my love, my soul, my life, only say that you believe me, and look kindly at me once again, then I will never trouble you again, I will only pray for you. But believe me, Victor. The Mother Superior of my convent will tell you it is the truth that I speak. O, for the love of Heaven, believe me! Believe me, or I shall die!"

It was not in the nature of man to resist her; there was truth in the girl's voice and face, if ever truth walked abroad on earth. And Conran did believe her, and told her so in a few unconnected words, lifting her up in his arms, and vowing, with most unrighteous oaths, that her father should never have power to persecute her again as long as he himself lived to shelter and take care of her.

I was so interested in my Monte Cristo and Haidee (it was so like a chapter out of a book), that I entirely forgot my durance vile, and my novel and excessively disgraceful, though enforced, occupation of spy; and there I stayed, alternating between my interest in them and my agonies at the revelations concerning my Eudoxia Adelaida—oh, hang it! I mean Sarah Briggs—till, after a most confounded long time, Conran saw fit to take Lucrezia off, to get asylum for her with the Colonel's wife for a day or two, that "those fools might not misconstrue her." By which comprehensive epithet he, I suppose, politely designated "Ours."

Then I went my ways to my own room, and there I found a scented, mauve-hued, creamy billet-doux, in uncommon bad handwriting, though, from my miserable Eudoxia Adelaida to the "friend and lover of her soul." Confound the woman!—how I swore at that daintily-perfumed and most vilely-scrawled letter. To think that where that beautiful signature stretched from one side to the other—"Eudoxia Adelaida St. Julian"—there *ought* to have been that short, vile, low-bred, hideous Billingsgate cognomen of "Sarah Briggs!"

In the note she reproached me—the wretched hypocrite!—for my departure the previous night, "without one farewell to your Eudoxia, O cruel Augustus!" and asked me to give her a rendezvous at some vineyards lying a little way off the Casa di Fiori, on the road to Melita. Now, being a foolish boy, and regarding myself as having been loved and wronged, whereas I had only been playing the very common *rôle* of pigeon, I could not resist the temptation of going, just to take one last look of that fair, cruel face, and upbraid her with being the first to sow the fatal seeds of lifelong mistrust and misery in my only two fond and faithful, &c. &c. &c.

So, at the appointed hour, just when the sun was setting over the far-away Spanish shore, and the hush of night was sinking over the little, rocky, peppery, military-thick, Mediterranean isle, I found myself *en route* to the vineyards, which, till I came to Malta, had been one of my delusions, Idea picturing them in wreaths and avenues, Reality proving them hop-sticks and parched earth. I drew near; it was quite dark now, the sun had gone to sleep under the blue waves, and the moon was not yet up. Though I knew she was Sarah Briggs, and an adventuress who had made game of me, two facts that one would fancy might chill the passion out of anybody, so mad was I about that woman, that if I had met her then and there, I should have let her wheedle me over, and gone back to the Casa di Fiori with her and been fleeced again: I am sure I should, sir, and so would you, if, at eighteen, new to life, you had fallen in with Eudox—— pshaw!—with Sarah Briggs, my Marchioness St. Julian.

I drew near the vineyards, my heart beat thick. I could not see, but I was certain I heard the rustle of her dress, caught the perfume of her hair. All her sins vanished : how could I upbraid her, though she were three times over Sarah Briggs? Yes, she was coming; I *felt* her near; an electric thrill rushed through me as soul met soul. I heard a murmured "Dearest, sweetest?" I felt a warm clasp of two arms, but——a cold row of undress waistcoat-buttons came against my face, and a voice I knew too well cried out, as I rebounded from him, impelled thereto by a not gentle kick.

"The devil! get out! Who the deuce are you?"

We both stopped for breath. At that minute up rose the silver moon, and in its tell-tale rays we glared on one another, I and Little Grand.

That silence was sublime : the pause between Beethoven's andante and allegro—the second before the Spanish bull rushes upon the torreador.

"You little miserable wretch!" burst out Grand, slowly and terribly; "you little, mean, sneaking, spying, contemptible milksop! I should like to know what you mean by bringing out your ugly phiz at this hour, when you used to be afraid of stirring out for fear of nurse's bogies? And to dare to come lurking after me!"

"After you, Mr. Grandison!" I repeated, with grandiloquence. "Really you put too much importance on your own movements. I came by appointment to meet the Marchioness St. Julian, whom, I presume, as you are well acquainted with her, you know in her real name of Sarah Briggs, and to——"

"Sarah Briggs!—*you* come by appointment?" stammered Little Grand.

"Yes, sir; if you disbelieve my word of honour, I will condescend to show you my invitation."

"You little ape!" swore Grand, coming back to his previous wrath;"it is a lie, a most abominable, unwarrantable lie! *I* came by appointment, sir; you did no such thing. Look there!"

And he flaunted before my eyes in the moonlight the facsimile of my letter, verbatim copy, save that in his Cosmo was put in the stead of Augustus.

"Look there!" said I, giving him mine.

Little Grand snatched it, read it over once, twice, thrice, then drooped his head, with a burning colour in his face, and was silent.

The "knowing hand" was done!

We were both of us uncommonly quiet for ten minutes, neither of us liked to be the first to give in.

At last Little Grand looked up and held out his hand, no more nonsense about him now.

" Simon, you and I have been two great fools; we can't chaff one another. She's a cursed actress, and—let's make it up, old boy."

We made it up accordingly—when Little Grand was not conceited he was a very jolly fellow—and then I gave him my whole key to the mysteries, intricacies, and charms of our Casa di Fiori. We could not chaff one another, but poor Little Grand was pitiably sore then, and for long afterwards. He, the "old bird," the cool hand, the sharp one of Ours, to have been done brown, to be the joke of the mess, the laugh of all the men, down to the weest drummer-boy! Poor Little Grand! He was too done up to swagger, too thoroughly angry with himself to swear at anybody else. He only whispered to me, " Why the dickens could she want you and me to meet ourselves?"

" To give us a finishing hoax, I suppose" I suggested.

Little Grand drew his cap over his eyes, and hung his head down in abject humiliation.

" I suppose so. What fools we have been, Simon! And, I say, I've borrowed three hundred of old Miraflores, and it's all gone up at that devilish Casa; and how I shall get it from the governor, Heaven knows, for *I* don't."

" I'm in the same pickle, Grand," I groaned. " I've given that old rascal notes of hand for two hundred pounds, and if it don't drop from the clouds, I shall never pay it. Oh, I say, Grand, love comes deucedly expensive."

" Ah!" said he, with a sympathetic shiver, " think what a pair of hunters we might have had for the money!" With which dismal and remorseful remembrance the old bird who had been trapped like a young pigeon, swore mightily, and withdrew into humbled and disgusted silence.

Next morning we heard, to our comfort—what lots of people there always are to tell us how to lock our stable door when our solitary mare has been stolen—that, with a gentle hint from the police, the Marchioness St. Julian, with her *confrères*, had taken wing to the Ionian Isles, where, at

Corfu or Cephalonia, they will re-erect the Casa di Fiori, and glide gently on again from vingt-et-un to loo, and from loo to lansquenet, under eyes as young and blinded as our own. They went without Lucrezia. Conran took her into his own hands. Any other man in the regiment would have been pretty well ridiculed at taking a bride out of the Casa di Fiori; but the statements made by the high-born Abbess of her Roman convert were so clear, and so to the girl's honour, and he had such a way of holding his own, of keeping off liberties from himself and anything belonging to him, and was, moreover, known to be of such fastidious honour, that his young wife was received as if she had been a Princess in her own right. With her respected parent Conran had a brief interview previous to his flight from Malta, in which, with a few gentle hints, he showed that worthy it would be wiser to leave his daughter unmolested for the future, and I doubt if Mr. Orangia Magnolia, *alias* Pepe Guari, would know his own child in the joyous, graceful, daintily-dressed mistress of Conran's handsome Parisian establishment.

Little Grand and I suffered cruelly. We were the butts of the mess for many a long month afterwards, when every idiot's tongue asked us on every side after the health of the Marchioness St. Julian? when we were going to teach them lansquenet? how often we heard from the aristocratic members of the Maltese Peerage? with like delightful pleasantries, which the questioners deemed high wit. We paid for it, too, to that arch old screw Balthazar; but I doubt very much if the money were not well lost, and the experience well gained. It cured me of my rawness and Little Grand of his self-conceit, the only thing that had before spoilt that good-hearted, quick-tempered, and clever-brained little fellow. Oh, Pater and Materfamilias, disturb not yourselves so unnecessarily about the crop of wild oats which your young ones are sowing broadcast. Those wild oats often spring from a good field of high spirit, hot courage, and thoughtless generosity, that are the sign and basis of nobler virtues to come, and from them very often rise two goodly plants—Experience and Discernment.

LADY MARABOUT'S TROUBLES;

OR,

THE WORRIES OF A CHAPERONE.

In Three Seasons.

SEASON THE FIRST.—THE ELIGIBLE.

One of the kindest-natured persons that I ever knew on this earth, where kind people are as rare as black eagles or red deer, is Helena, Countess of Marabout, *née* De Boncœur. She has foibles, she has weaknesses—who amongst us has not?—she will wear her dresses *décolletées,* though she's sixty, if Burke tells us truth; she will rouge and practise a thousand other little toilette tricks; but they are surely innocent, since they deceive nobody; and if you wait for a woman who has no artifices, I am afraid you shall have to forswear the sex *in toto,* my friends, and come growling back to your Diogenes' tub in the Albany, with your lantern still lit every day of your lives.

Lady Marabout is a very charming person. As for her weaknesses, she is all the nicer for them, to my taste. I like people with weaknesses myself; those without them do look so dreadfully scornfully and unsympathisingly upon one from the altitude of their superiority, *de toute la hauteur de sa bêtise,* as a witty Frenchman says. Humanity was born with weaknesses. If I were a beggar I might hope for a coin from a man with some; a man without any, I know, would shut up his porte-monnaie, with an intensified click, to make me feel trebly envious, and consign me to D 15 and his truncheon, on the score of vagrancy.

Lady Marabout is a very charming person, despite her little foibles, and she gives very pleasant little dinners, both at her house in Lowndes-square and in her jointure-villa at Twickenham, where the bad odours of the Thames are drowned in the fragrance of the geraniums, piled in great heaps of red, white, and variegated blossom in the flower-beds on the lawn. She has been married twice, but has only one son, by her first union—Carruthers of the Guards—a very good fellow, whom his mother thinks perfection, though if she *did* know certain scenes in her adored Philip's life, the good lady might hesitate before she endowed her son with all the cardinal virtues as she does at the present moment. She has no daughters, therefore you will wonder to hear that the prime misery, burden, discomfort, and worry of her life is chaperonage. But so it is.

Lady Marabout is the essence of good nature; she can't say No: that unpleasant negative monosyllable was never heard to issue from her full, smiling, kind-looking lips: she is in a high position, she has an extensive circle, thanks to her own family and those of the baronet and peer she successively espoused; and some sister, or cousin, or friend, is incessantly hunting her up to bring out their girls, and sell them well off out of hand; young ladies being goods extremely likely to hang *on* hand now-a-days.

"Of all troubles, the troubles of a chaperone are the greatest," said Lady Marabout to me at the wedding déjeûner of one of her protégées. "In the first place, one looks on at others' campaigns instead of conducting them oneself; secondly, it brings back one's own bright days to see the young things' smiles and blushes, like that girl's just now (I do hope she'll be happy!); and thirdly, one has all the responsibility, and gets all the blame if anything goes wrong. I'll never chaperone anybody again now I have got rid of Leila."

So does Lady Marabout say twenty times; yet has she invariably some young lady under her wing, whose relatives are defunct, or invalided, or in India, or out of society somehow; and we all of us call her house The Yard, and her (among ourselves) not Lady Marabout but Lady Tattersall. The worries she has in her chaperone's office would fill a folio, specially as her heart inclines to the encouragement of romance, but her reason to the banishment thereof; and while her tenderness suffers if she thwarts her protégées' leanings, her conscience gives her neuralgic twinges if she abets them to unwise matches while under her dragonnage.

"What's the matter, mother?" asked Carruthers, one morning. He's very fond of his mother, and will never let any one laugh at her in his hearing.

"Matter? Everything!" replied Lady Marabout, concisely and comprehensively, as she sat on the sofa in her boudoir, with her white ringed hands and her *bien conservé* look, and her kindly pleasant eyes and her rich dress; one could see what a pretty woman she had been, and that Carruthers may thank her for his good looks. "To begin with, Félicie has been so stupid as to marry; married the greengrocer (whom she will ruin in a week!), and has left me to the mercies of a stupid woman who puts pink with cerise, mauve with magenta, and sky-blue with azureline, and has no recommendation except that she is as ugly as the Medusa, and so will not tempt you to——"

"Make love to her, as I did to Marie," laughed Carruthers. "Marie was a pretty little dear; it was very severe in you to send her away."

Lady Marabout tried hard to look severe and condemnatory, but failed signally: nature had formed the smooth brow and the kindly eyes in far too soft a mould.

"Don't jest about it, Philip; you know it was a great pain, annoyance, and scandal to me. Well! Félicie is gone, and Oakes was seen pawning some of my Mechlin the other day, so I have been obliged to discharge *her;* and they both of them suited me so well! Then Bijou is ill, poor little pet——"

"With repletion of chicken panada?"

"No; Bijou isn't such a gourmet. You judge him by yourself, I suppose; men always do! Then Lady Hautton told me last night that you were the wildest man on town, and at forty——"

"You think I ought to *ranger?* So I will, my dear mother, some day; but at present I am—so very comfortable; it would be a pity to alter! What pains one's friends are always at to tell unpalatable things; if they would but be only half so eager to tell us the pleasant ones! I shall expect you to cut Lady Hautton if she speak badly of me. I can't afford to lose your worship, mother!"

"My worship? How conceited you are, Philip! As for Lady Hautton, I believe she does dislike you, because you did not engage yourself to Adelina, and were selected aide-de-camp to Her Majesty, instead of Hautton; still, I am afraid she spoke too nearly the truth."

"Perhaps Marie has entered her service and told tales."

But Lady Marabout wouldn't laugh, she always looks very grave about Marie.

"My worst trouble," she began hastily, "is that your Aunt Honiton is too ill to come to town; no chance of her being well enough to come at all this season; and of course the charge of Valencia has devolved on me. You know how I hate chaperoning, and I did *so* hope I should be free this year; besides, Valencia is a great responsibility, very great; a girl of so much beauty always is; there will be sure to be so many men about her at once, and your aunt will expect me to marry her so very well. It is excessively annoying."

"My poor dear mother!" cried Carruthers. "I grant you *are* an object of pity. You are everlastingly having young fillies sent you to break in, and they want such a tight hand on the ribbons."

"And a tight hand, as you call it, I never had, and never shall have," sighed Lady Marabout. "Valencia will be no trouble to me on that score, however; she has been admirably educated, knows all that is due to her position, and will never give me a moment's anxiety by any imprudence or inadvertence. But she is excessively handsome, and a beauty is a great responsibility when she first comes out."

"Val was always a handsome child, if I remember. I dare say she is a beauty now. When is she coming up? because I'll tell the men to mark the house and keep clear of it," laughed Carruthers. "You're a dreadfully dangerous person, mother; you have always the best-looking girl in town with you. Fulke Nugent says if he should ever want such a thing as a wife when he comes into the title, he shall take a look at the Marabout Yearling's Sale."

"Abominably rude of you and your friends to talk me over in your turf slang! I wish *you* would come and bid at the sale, Philip; I should like to see you married—well married, of course."

"My beloved mother!" cried Carruthers. "Leave me in peace, if you please, and catch the others if you can. There's Goodey, now; every chaperone and débutante in London has set traps for him for the last I don't know how many years; wouldn't he do for Valencia?"

"Goodwood? Of course he would; he would do for any one; the Dukedom's the oldest in the peerage. Goodwood is highly eligible. Thank you for reminding me, Philip. Since Valencia is coming, I must do my best for her." Which phrase meant, with Lady Marabout, that she must be very lynx-eyed as to settlements, and a perfect dragon to all detrimental connexions, must frown with Medusa severity on all horrors of younger sons, and advocate with all the weight of personal experience the advantage and agrémens of a good position, in all of which practicalities she generally broke down, with humiliation unspeakable, immediately her heart was enlisted and her sympathies appealed to on the enemy's side.—She sighed, played with her bracelets thoughtfully, and then, heroically resigning herself to her impending fate, brightened up a little, and asked her son to go and choose a new pair of carriage-horses for her.

To look at Lady Marabout as she sat in her amber satin couch that morning, pleasant, smiling, well dressed, well looking, with the grace of good birth and the sunniness of good nature plainly written on her smooth brow and her kindly eyes, and wealth—delicious little god!—stamping itself all about her, from the diamond rings on her soft white fingers to the broidered shoe on the feet, of whose smallness she was still proud, one might have ignorantly imagined her to be the most happy, enviable, well-conditioned, easy-going dowager in the United Kingdom. But appearances are deceptive, and if we believe what she constantly asserted, Lady Marabout was very nearly worn into her grave by a thousand troubles; her almshouses, whose roof would eternally blow off with each high wind; her dogs, whom she would overfeed; her ladies' maids, who were hired only to steal, tease, or scandalise her; the begging-letter writers, who distilled tears from her eyes and sovereigns from her purse, let Carruthers disclose their hypocrisies as he might; the bolder begging-letters, written by hon. secs., and headed by names with long handles, belonging to Pillars of the State and Lights of the Church, which compelled her to make a miserable choice between a straitened income or a remorseful conscience—tormented, in fine, with worries small and large, from her ferns, on which she spent a large fortune, and who drooped maliciously in their glass cases, with an ill-natured obstinacy characteristic of desperately-courted individuals, whether of the floral or the human world, to those marriageable young ladies whom she took under her wing to usher into the great world, and who were certain to run counter to her wishes and overthrow her plans, to marry ill, or not marry at all, or do something or other to throw discredit on her chaperoning abilities. She was, she assured us, *pétrie* with worries, small and large, specially as she was so eminently sunny, affable, and radiant a looking person, that all the world took their troubles to her, selected her as their confidante, and made her the repository of their annoyances; but her climax of misery was to be compelled to chaperone, and as a petition for some débutante to be entrusted to her care was invariably made each season, and "No" was a monosyllable into which her lips utterly refused to form themselves, each season did her life become a burden to her. There was never any rest for the soul of Helena, Countess of Marabout, till her house in Lowndes-square was shut up, and her charges off her hand, and she could return in peace to her jointure-villa at Twickenham, or to Carruthers' old Hall of Deepdene, and among her flowers, her birds, and her hobbies, throw off for a while the weary burden of her worries as a chaperone.

"Valencia will give me little trouble, I hope. So admirably brought-up a girl, and so handsome as she is, will be sure to marry soon, and marry well," thought Lady Marabout, self-congratulatorily, as she dressed for dinner the day of her niece's arrival in town, running over mentally, the qualifications and attractions of Valencia Valletort, while Félicie's successor, Mademoiselle Despréaux, whose crime was to put pink with cerise, mauve with magenta, and sky-blue with azureline, gave the finishing touches to her toilette—"Valencia will give me no trouble; she has all the De Boncœur beauty, with the Valletort dignity. Who would do for her? Let me see; eligible men are not abundant, and those that are eligible are shy of being marked, as Philip would say—perhaps from being hunted so much, poor things! There is Fulke Nugent, heir to a barony, and his father is ninety—very rich, too—he would do; and Philip's friend, Caradoc, poor, I know, but their Earldom's the oldest peerage patent. There is Eyre Lee, too; I don't much like the man, supercilious and empty-headed; still he's an unobjectionable alliance. And there is Goodwood. Every one has tried for Goodwood, and failed. I should like Valencia to win him; he is decidedly the most eligible man in town. I will invite him to dinner. If he is not attracted by Valencia's beauty, nothing can attrract him——*Despréaux! comme vous êtes bête! Otez ces panaches, de grace!*"

"Valencia will give me no trouble; she will marry at once," thought Lady Marabout again, looking across the dinner-table at her niece.

If any young patrician might be likely to marry at once, it was the Hon. Valencia Valletort; she was, to the most critical, a beauty: her figure was perfect, her features were perfect, and if you complained that her large glorious eyes were a trifle too changeless in expression, that her cheek, exquisitely independent of Maréchale powder, Blanc de Perle, and liquid rouge, though it was, rarely varied with her thoughts and feelings, why, you were very exacting, my good fellow, and should remember that nothing is quite perfect on the face of this earth—not even a racer or a woman—and that whether you bid at the Marabout Yearlings' Sale or the Rawcliffe, if you wish to be pleased you'd better leave a hypercritical spirit behind you, and not expect to get *all* points to your liking. The best filly will have something faulty in temper or breeding, symmetry or pace, for your friend Jack Martingale to have the fun of pointing out to you when your money is paid and the filly in your stall; and your wife will have the same, only Martingale will point *her* flaws out behind your back, and only hint them to you with an all-expressive "Not allowed to smoke in the dining-room *now!*" "A little bit of a flirt, madam—n'est-ce pas, Charlie?" "Reins kept rather tight, eh, old fellow?" or something equally ambiguous, significant, and unpleasant.

"I must consider, Philip, I have brought out the beauty of the season," said Lady Marabout to Carruthers, eyeing her niece as she danced at her first ball at the Dowager-Duchess of Amandine's, and beginning to brighten up a little under the weight of her responsibilities.

"I think you have, mother. Val's indisputably handsome. You must tell her to make play with Goodwood or Nugent."

Lady Marabout unfurled her fan, and indignantly interrupted him:

"My dear Philip! do you suppose I would teach Valencia, or any girl under my charge, to lay herself out for any man, whoever or whatever he might be? I trust your cousin would not stoop to use such manœuvres, did I even stoop to counsel them. Depend on it, Philip, it is precisely those women who try to 'make play,' as you call it, with your sex that fail most to charm them. It is abominable the way in which you men talk, as if we all hunted you down, and would drive you to St. George's *nolens volens!*"

"So you would, mother," laughed Carruthers. "We 'eligible men' have a harder life of it than rabbits in a warren, with a dozen beagles after them. From the minute we're of age, we're beset with traps for the unwary, and the spring guns are so dexterously covered with an inviting, innocent-looking turf of courtesies and hospitalities that it's next to a moral impossibility to escape them, let one retire into oneself, keep to monosyllables through all the courses of all the dinners and all the turns of all the valses, and avoid everything 'compromising,' as one may. I've suffered, and can tell you. I suffer still, though I believe and hope they are beginning to look on me as an incurable, given over to the clubs, the coulisses, and the cover-side. There's a fellow that's known still more of the *peines fortes et dures* than I. Goodwood's coming to ask for an introduction to Val, I would bet."

He was coming for that purpose, and though Lady Marabout has so scornfully and sincerely repudiated her son's counsel relative to making play with Goodwood, blandly ignorant of her own weaknesses like a good many other people, Lady Marabout was not above a glow of chaperone gratification when she saw the glance of admiration, which the Pet Eligible of the season bestowed on Valencia Valletort. Goodwood was a good-looking fellow—a clever fellow—though possibly he shone best alone at a mess luncheon, in a chat driving to Hornsey Wood, round the fire in a smoking-room, on a yacht deck, or anywhere where ladies of the titled world were not encountered, he having become afraid of them by dint of much persecution, as any October partridge of a setter's nose. He was passably good-looking, ordinarily clever, a very good fellow as I say, and—he was elder son of his Grace of Doncaster, which fact would have made him the desired of every unit of the *beau sexe*, had he been hideous as the Veiled Prophet or brutal Gilles de Rayes. The Beauty often loves the Beast in our day, as in the days of fairy lore. We see that beloved story of our petticoat days not seldom acted out, and when there is no possibility of personal transmogrification and amelioration for the Beast moreover; only—the Beauty has always had whispered in her little ear the title she will win, and the revenues she will gain, and the cloth of gold she will wear, if she caresses Bruin the enamoured, swears his ugly head is god-like, and vows fidelity unswerving!

Goodwood was no uncouth Bruin, and he had strawberry-leaves in his gift; none of your lacquered, or ormolu, or silver-gilt coronets, such as are cast about now-a-days with a liberality that reminds one of flinging a handful of halfpence from a balcony, where the nimblest beggar is first to get the prize; but of the purest and best gold; and Goodwood had been tried for accordingly by every woman he came across for the last dozen years. Women of every style and every order had primed all their rifles, and had their shot at him, and done their best to make a centre and score themselves as winner: belles and bas bleus, bewitching widows and budding débutantes, fast young ladies who tried to capture him in the hunting-field by clearing a bullfinch; saintly young ladies, who illuminated missals, and hinted they would like to take his conversion in hand; brilliant women, who talked at him all through a long rainy day, when Perthshire was flooded, and the black-fowl unattainable; showy women, who *poséd* for him whole evenings in their opera-boxes, whole mornings in their boudoir—all styles and orders had set at him, till he had sometimes sworn in his haste that all women were mantraps, and that he wished to Heaven he were a younger son in the Foreign Office, or a poor devil in the Line, or anything, rather than what he was—the Pet Eligible of his day.

" Goodwood is certainly struck with her," thought Lady

Marabout, as Despréaux disrobed her that night, running over with a retrogressive glance Valencia Valletort's successes at her first ball. "Very much struck, indeed, I should say. I will issue cards for another 'At Home.' As for 'making play' with him, as Philip terms it, of course that is only a man's nonsense. Valencia will need none of those trickeries, I trust; still, it is any one's duty to make the best alliance possible for such a girl, and—dear Adeliza would be very pleased."

With which amiable remembrance of her sister (whom, conceiving it her duty to love, Lady Marabout persuaded herself that she *did* love, from a common feminine opticism that there's an eleventh commandment which makes it compulsory to be attached to relatives *n'importe* of whatever degree of disagreeability, though Lady Honiton was about the most odious hypochondriac going, in a perpetual state of unremitting battle with the whole outer world in general, and allapathists, homœopathists, and hydropathists, in especial), the most amiable lady in all Christendom bade Despréaux bring up a cup of coffee an hour earlier in the morning, she had so much to do! asked if Bijou had had some panada set down by his basket in case he wanted something to take in the night; wished her maid good-night, and laid her head on her pillow as the dawn streamed through the shutters, already settling what bridal presents she should give her niece Valencia, when she became present Marchioness of Goodwood and prospective Duchess of Doncaster before the altar rails of St. George's.

"That's a decidedly handsome girl, that cousin of yours, Phil," said Goodwood, on the pavement before her Grace of Amandine's, in Grosvenor-place, at the same hour that night.

"I think she *is* counted like me!" said Carruthers. "Of course, she's handsome; hasn't she De Boncœur blood in her, my good fellow? We're all of us good-looking, always have been, thank God! If you're inclined to sacrifice, Goodwood, now's your time, and my mother 'll be delighted. She's brought out about half a million of débutantes, I should say, in her time, and all of 'em have gone wrong, somehow; wouldn't go off at all, like damp gunpowder, or would go off too quick in the wrong direction, like a volunteer's rifle charge; married ignominiously or married obstinately, or never excited pity in the breast of any man, but had to retire to single-blessedness in the country, console themselves with piety and an harmonium, and spread nets for young clerical victims. Give her a triumph at last, and let her have glory for once, as a chaperone, in catching *you!*"

Goodwood gave a little shiver, and tried to light a Manilla, which utterly refused to take light, for the twelfth time in half a minute.

"Hold your tongue! If the Templars' Order were extant, wouldn't I take the vows and bless them! What an unspeakable comfort and protection that white cross would be to us, Phil, if we could stick it on our coats, and know it would say to every woman that looked at us, 'No go, my pretty little dears—not to be caught!' Marriage! I can't remember any time that that word wasn't my bugbear. When I was but a little chicken, some four years old, I distinctly remember, when I was playing with little Ida Keane on the terrace, hearing her mother simper to mine, 'Perhaps darling Goodwood may marry my little Ida some day, who knows?' I never would play with Ida afterwards; instinct preserved me; she's six or seven-and-thirty now, and weighs ten stone I'm positive. Why *won't* they let us alone? The way journalists and dowagers, the fellows who want to write a taking article, and the women who want to get rid of a taking daughter, all badger us, in public and private, about marriage just now, is abominable, on my life; the affair's *ours*, I should say, not theirs, and to marry isn't the ultimatum of a man's existence, nor anything like it."

"I hope not! It's more like the extinguisher. Good-night, old fellow." And Carruthers drove away in his hansom, while Goodwood got into his night-brougham, thinking that for the sake of the title, the evil (nuptial) day *must* come, sooner or later, but dashed off to forget the disagreeable obligation over the supper-table of the most sparkling empress of the demi-monde.

Lady Marabout had her wish; she brought out the belle of the season, and when a little time had slipped by, when the Hon. Val had been presented at the first Drawing-room, and shone there despite the worry, muddle, and squeeze incidental to that royal and fashionable ceremony; and she had gathered second-hand from her son what was said in the clubs relative to this new specimen of the Valletort beauty, she began to be happier under her duties than she had ever been before, and wrote letters to "dearest Adeliza," brimful of superlative adjectives and genuine warmth.

"Valencia will do me credit; I shall see her engaged, before the end of June; she will have only to choose," Lady Marabout would say to herself some twenty times in the pauses of the morning concerts, the morning parties, the bazaar committees, the toilette consultations, the audiences to religious beggars, whose name was Legion and rapacity unmeasured, the mass of unanswered correspondence whose debt lay as heavily on Lady Marabout as his chains on a convict, and were about as little likely to be knocked off, and all the other things innumerable that made her life in the season one teetotum whirl of small worries and sunshiny cares, from the moment she began her day, with her earliest cup of Mocha softened with cream from that pet dairy of hers at Fernditton, where, according to Lady Marabout, the cows were constantly in *articulo mortis*, but the milk invariably richer than anywhere else, an agricultural anomaly which presented no difficulties to *her* reason. Like all women, she loved paradoxes, defied logic recklessly, and would clear at a bound a chasm of solecisms that would have kept Plato in difficulties about crossing it, and in doubt about the strength of his jumping-pole, all his life long.

"She will do me great credit," the semi-consoled chaperone would say to herself with self congratulatory relief; and if Lady Marabout thought now and then, "I wish she were a trifle—a trifle more—demonstrative," she instantly checked such an ungrateful and hypercritical wish, and remembered that a heart is a highly treacherous and unadvisable possession for any young lady, and a most happy omission in her anatomy, though Lady Marabout had, she would confess to herself on occasions with great self-reproach, an unworthy and lingering weakness for that contraband article, for which she scorned and scolded herself with the very worst success.

Lady Marabout *had* a heart herself; to it she had had to date the greatest worries, troubles, imprudences, and vexations of her life; she had had to thank it for nothing, and to dislike it for much; it had made her grieve most absurdly for other people's griefs; it had given her a hundred unphilosophical pangs at philosophic ingratitude from people who wanted her no longer; it had teased, worried, and plagued her all her life long, had often interfered in the most meddling and inconvenient manner between her and her reason, her comfort and her prudence; and yet she had a weakness for the same detrimental organ in other people—a weakness of which she could no more have cured herself than of her belief in the detection-defying powers of liquid rouge, the potentiality of a Lilliputian night-bolt against an army of burglars, the miraculous properties of sal-volatile, the efficacy of sermons, and such-like articles of faith common to feminine orthodoxy. A weakness of which she never felt more ignominiously convicted and more secretly ashamed than in the presence of Miss Valletort, that young lady having a lofty and magnificent disdain for all such follies, quite unattainable to ordinary mortals, which oppressed Lady Marabout with a humiliating sense of inferiority to her niece of eighteen summers. "So admirably educated! so admirably brought up!" she would say to herself over and over again; and if heretic suggestions that the stiffest trained flowers are not always the best, that the upright and spotless arum-lily isn't so fragrant as the careless, brilliant, tangled clematis; that rose-boughs, tossing free in sunshine and liberty, beat hollow the most carefully-pruned standard that ever won a medal at Regent's Park, with such-like allegories, arising from contemplation of her conservatory or her balcony flowers, *would* present themselves, Lady Marabout repressed them dutifully, and gratefully thought how many pounds' weight lighter became the weary burden of a chaperone's responsibilities when the onerous charge had been educated "on the best system."

"Goodwood's attentions *are* serious, Philip, say what you like," said the Countess to her son, as determinedly as a theologian states his pet points with wool in his ears, that he may not hear any Satan-inspired, rational, and mathematical disproval of them, with which you may rashly seek to soil his tympana and smash his arguments—"Goodwood's intentions *are* serious, Philip, say what you like," said her ladyship, at a morning party at Kew, eating her Neapolitan ice, complacently glancing at the "most eligible alliance of the season," who was throwing the balls at lawn-billiards, and talking between whiles to the Hon. Val with praiseworthy and promising animation.

"Serious indeed, mother, if they tend matrimony-wards!" smiled Carruthers. "It's a very serious time indeed for unwary sparrows when they lend an ear to the call-bird, and think about hopping on to the lime-twigs. I should think it's from a sense of compunction for the net you've led us into, that you all particularise our attentions, whenever they point near St. George's, by that very suggestive little adjective 'serious!' Yes, I am half afraid poor Goodey *is* a little touched. He threw over our Derby sweepstakes up at Hornsey Wood yesterday to go and stifle himself in Willis's Rooms at your bazaar, and buy a guinea cup of Souchong from Valencia; and, considering he's one of the best shots in England, I don't think you could have a more conclusive, if you could have a more poetic, proof of devoted renunciation. *I*'d fifty times rather get a spear in my side, à la Ivanhoe, for a woman than give up a Pigeon-match, a Cup-day, or a Field night!"

"You'll never do either!" laughed Lady Marabout, who made it one of her chief troubles that her son would not marry, chiefly, probably, because if he *had* married she would have been miserable, and thought no woman good enough for him, would have been jealous of his wife's share of his heart, and supremely wretched, I have no doubt, at his throwing himself away, as she would have thought it, had his handkerchief lighted on a Princess born, lovely as Galatea, and blessed with Venus's cestus.

"Never, *plaise à Dieu!*" responded her son piously over his ice; "but if Goodwood's serious, what's Cardonnel? *He's* lost his head, if you like, after the Valletort beauty."

"Major Cardonnel!" said Lady Marabout, hastily. "Oh no, I don't think so. I hope not—I trust not."

"Why so? He's one of the finest fellows in the Service."

"I dare say; but you see, my dear Philip, he's not—not—desirable."

Carruthers stroked his moustaches and laughed:

"Fie, fie, mother! if all other Belgraviennes are Mammon-worshippers, I thought you kept clear of the paganism. I thought your freedom from it was the only touch by which your weren't 'purely feminine,' as the lady novelists say of their pet bits of chill propriety."

"Worship Mammon! Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Lady Marabout. "But there are duties, you see, my dear; your friend is a very delightful man, to be sure; I like him excessively, and if Valencia felt any *great* preference for him——"

"You'd feel it *your* duty to counsel her to throw him over for Goodwood?"

"I never said so, Philip," interrupted Lady Marabout with as near an approach to asperity as she could achieve, which approach was less like vinegar than most people's best honey.

"But you implied it. What are 'duties' else, and why is poor Cardonnel 'not desirable'?"

Lady Marabout played a little tattoo with her spoon in perplexity:

"My dear Philip, you know as well as I do what I mean. One might think you were a boy of twenty to hear you!"

"My dear mother, like all disputants, when beaten in argument and driven into a corner, you resort to vituperation of your opponent!" laughed Carruthers, as he left her, and lounged away to pick up the stick with which pretty Flora Elmers had just knocked the pipe out of Aunt Sally's head on to the velvet lawn of Lady George Frangipane's dower-house, leaving his mother by no means tranquillised by his suggestions."

"Dear me!" thought Lady Marabout, uneasily, as she conversed with the Dowager-Countess of Patchouli on the respective beauties of two new pelargonium seedlings, the Leucadia and the Beatrice, for which her gardener had won prizes the day before at the Regent's Park show—"dear me! why is there invariably this sort of cross-purposes in everything? It will be so grievous to lose Goodwood (and he *is* decidedly struck with her; when he bought that rose-bud yesterday of her at the bazaar, and put it in the breast of his waistcoat, I heard what he said, and it was no nonsense, no mere flirting complaisance either)—it would be so grievous to lose him; and yet if Valencia really care for Cardonnel—and sometimes I almost fancy she does—I shouldn't know which way to advise. I thought it would be odd if a season could pass quietly without my having some worry of this sort! With fifty men always about Valencia, as they are, how *can*

I be responsible for any mischief that might happen, though, to hear Philip talk, one would really imagine it was *my* fault that they lost their heads, as he calls it! As if a forty-horse steam-power could stop a man when he's once off down the incline into love! The more you try to pull him back the more impetus you give him to go headlong down. I wish Goodwood would propose, and we could settle the affair definitively. It is singular, but she has had no offers hardly with all her beauty. It is very singular, in *my* first season I had almost as many as I had names on my tablets at Almack's. But men don't marry now, they say. Perhaps 'tisn't to be wondered at, though I wouldn't allow it to Philip. Poor things! they lose a very great many pleasant things by it, and get nothing, I am sure, nine times out of ten, except increased expenses and unwelcome worries. I don't think I would have married if I'd been a man, though I'd never admit it, of course, to one of them. There are plenty of women who know too much of their own sex ever to wonder that a man doesn't marry, though of course we don't say so; 'twouldn't be to our interest. Sculptors might as well preach iconoclasm, or wine merchants teetotalism, as women misoganism, however little in our hearts we may marvel at it. Oh, my dear Lady Patchouli! you praise the Leucadia too kindly—you do indeed—but if you really think so much of it, let me send you some slips. I shall be most happy, and Fenton will be only too proud; it is his favourite seedling."

Carruthers was quite right. One fellow at least had lost his head after the beauty of the season, and he was Cardonnel, of the — Lancers, as fine a fellow, as Philip said, as any in the Queen's, but a dreadful detrimental in the eyes of all chaperones because he was but the fourth son of one of the poorest peers in the United Kingdom, a fact which gave him an ægis from all assaults matrimonial, and a freedom from all smiles and wiles, traps and gins, which Goodwood was accustomed to tell him he bitterly envied him, and on which Cardonnel had fervently congratulated himself, till he came under the fire of the Hon. Val's large luminous eyes one night, when he was levelling his glass from his stall at Lady Marabout's box, to take a look at the new belle, as advised to do by that most fastidious female critic, Vane Steinberg. Valencia Valletort's luminous eyes had gleamed that night under their lashes, and pierced through the lenses of his lorgnon. He saw her, and saw nothing but her afterwards, as men looking on the sun keep it on their retina to the damage and exclusion of all other objects.

Physical beauty, even when it is a little bit soulless, is an admirable weapon for instantaneous slaughter, and the trained and pruned standard roses show a very effective mass of bloom; though, as Lady Marabout's floral tastes and experiences told her, they don't give one the lasting pleasure that a careless bough of wild rose will do, with its untutored grace and its natural fragrance. With the standard you see we keep in the artificial air of the horticultural tent, and are never touched out of it for a second; its perfume seems akin to a bouquet, and its destiny is, we are sure, to a parterre. The wild-rose fragrance breaths of the hill-side and the woodlands, and brings back to us soft touches of memory, of youth, of a fairer life and a purer air than that in which we are living now.

The Hon. Val did *not* have as many offers as her aunt and chaperone had on the first flush of her pride in her anticipated. Young ladies, educated on the "best systems," are apt to be a trifle wearisome, and *don't*, somehow or other, take so well as the sedulous efforts of their pruners and trainers—the rarefied moral atmosphere of the conservatories, in which they are carefully screened from ordinary air, and the anxiety evinced lest the flower should ever forget itself, and sway naturally in the wind—deserve. But Cardonnel had gone mad after her, that perfect face of hers had done for him; and whatever Goodwood might be, *he* was serious—he positively haunted the young beauty like her own shadow—he was leaning on the rails every morning of his life that she took her early ride—he sent her bouquets as lavishly as if he'd been a nursery gardener. By some species of private surveillance, or lover's clairvoyance, he knew beforehand where she would go, and was at the concert, fête, morning party, bazaar, or whatever it happened to be, as surely as was Lady Marabout herself. Poor Cardonnel was serious, and fiercely fearful of his all-powerful and entirely eligible rival; though greater friends than he and Goodwood had been, before this girl's face appeared on the world of Belgravia, never lounged arm-and-arm into Pratt's, or strolled down the "sweet shady side of Pall-Mall."

Goodwood's attentions were very marked, too, even to eyes less willing to construe them so than Lady Marabout's. Goodwood himself, if chaffed on the subject, vouchsafed nothing; laughed, stroked his moustaches, or puffed his cigar, if he happened to have that blessed resource in all difficulties, and comforter under all embarrassments, between his lips at the moment; but decidedly he sought Valencia Valletort more, or, to speak more correctly, he shunned her less, than he'd ever done any other young lady, and one or two Sunday mornings—*mirabile dictu!*—he was positively seen at Saint Paul's, Knightsbridge, in the seat behind Lady Marabout's sittings—a fact which, combining as it did a brace of miracles at once, of early rising and unusual piety, set every Belgravienne in that fashionable sanctuary watching over the top of her illuminated prayer-book, to the utter destruction of her hopes and interruption of her orisons.

Dowagers began to tremble behind their fans, young ladies to quake over their bouquets; the topic was eagerly discussed by every woman from Clarges-street to Lowndes-square; their Graces of Doncaster smiled well pleased on Valencia—she was unquestionable blood, and they *so* wished dear Goodwood to settle! There was whispered an awful whisper to the whole female world; whispered over matutinal chocolate, and luncheon Strasbourg pâtés, ball-supper Moëts, and demi-monde-supper Silleri, over Vane Steinberg's cigar and Eulalie Rosière's cigarette, over the *Morning Post* in the clubs, and *Le Follet* in the boudoir, that—the Pet Eligible would—marry! That the Pet Prophecy of universal smash was going to be fulfilled could hardly have occasioned greater consternation.

The soul of Lady Marabout had been disquieted ever since her son's suggestions at Lady George Frangipane's morning party, and she began to worry: for herself, for Valencia, for Goodwood, for Cardonnel, for her responsibilties in general, and for her "dearest Adeliza's" alternate opinions of her duenna qualifications in particular. Lady Marabout had an intense wish, an innocent wish enough, as innocent and very similar in its way to that of an Eton boy to make a centre at a rifle-contest, viz., to win the Marquis of Goodwood; innocent, surely, for though neither the rifle prize nor the Pet Eligible could be won without mortification unspeakable to a host of unsuccessful aspirants, if we decree that sort of thing sinful and selfish, as everything natural seems to me to get decreed now-a-days, we may as well shut up at once;

if we may not try for the top of the pole, why erect poles at all, monsieur? If we must not do our best to pass our friend and brother, we must give up climbing for ever, and go on all fours placably with Don and Pontos.

Everybody has his ambition: one sighs for the Woolsack, another for the Hunt Cup; somebody longs to be First Minister, somebody else pines to be first dancer; one man plumes himself on a new fish-sauce, another on a fresh reform bill. A. thirsts to get a single brief, B. for the time when he shall be worried with no briefs at all; C. sets his hopes on being the acrobat at Cremorne, D. on being the acrobat at the Tuileries; fat bacon is Hodge the hedger's *summum bonum*, and Johannisberg *pur* is mine; Empedocles thinks notoriety everything, and Diogenes thinks quiet everything—each has his own reading of ambition, and Lady Marabout had hers; the Duchess of Doncaster thirsted for the Garter for her husband, Lady Elmers's pride was to possess the smallest terrier that ever took daisy tea and was carried in a monkey-muff, her Grace of Amandine slaved night and day to bring her party in and throw the ministry out. Lady Marabout sighed but for one thing—to win the Pet Eligible of the season, and give éclat for once to one phase of her chaperone's existence.

Things were nicely in train. Goodwood was beginning to bite at that very handsome fly the Hon. Val, and promised to be hooked and landed without much difficulty before long, and placed, hopelessly for him, triumphantly for her, in the lime-basket of matrimony. Things were beautifully in train, and Lady Marabout was for once flattering herself she should float pleasantly through an unruffled and successful season, when Carruthers poured the one drop of *amari aliquid* into her champagne-cup by his suggestion of Cardonnel's doom. And then Lady Marabout began to worry.

She who could not endure to see a fly hurt or a flower pulled needlessly, had nothing for it but to worry for Cardonnel's destiny, and puzzle over the divided duties which Carruthers had hinted to her. To reject the one man because he was not well off did seem to her conscience, uncomfortably awakened by Phil's innuendoes, something more mercenary than she quite liked to look at; yet to throw over the other, future Duke of Doncaster, the eligible, the darling, the yearned-for of all May Fair and Belgravia, seemed nothing short of madness to inculcate to Valencia; a positive treason to that poor absent, trusting, "dearest Adeliza," who, after the visions epistolarily spread out before her, would utterly refuse to be comforted if Goodwood any way failed to become her son-in-law, and, moreover, the heaviest blow to Lady Marabout herself that the merciless axe of that brutal headsman Contretemps could deal her.

"I do not know really what to do or what to advise," would Lady Marabout say to herself over and over again (so disturbed by her onerous burden of responsibilities that she would let Despréaux arrange the most outrageous coiffures, and, never noticing them, go out to dinner with emeralds on blue velvet, or something as shocking to feminine nerves in her temporary aberration), forgetting one very great point, which, remembered, would have saved her all trouble, that nobody asked her to do anything, and not a soul requested her advice. "But Goodwood is decidedly won, and Goodwood must not be lost; in our position we owe something to Society," she would invariably conclude these mental debates with, which last phrase, being of a vagueness and obscure application that might have matched it with any Queen's speech or electional address upon record, was a mysterious balm to Lady Marabout's soul, and spoke volumes to *her*, if a trifle hazy to you and to me.

But Lady Marabout, if she was a little bit of a sophist, had not worn her eye-glass all these years without being keen-sighted on some subjects, and, though perfectly satisfied with her niece's conduct with Goodwood, saw certain symptoms which made her tremble lest the detrimental Lancer should have won greater odds than the eligible Marquis.

"Arthur Cardonnel is excessively handsome! Such very good style! Isn't it a pity they're all so poor! His father played away everything—literally everything. The sons have no more to marry upon, any one of them, than if they were three crossing-sweepers," said her ladyship, carelessly, driving home from St. Paul's one Sunday morning.

And, watching the effect of her stray arrows, she had beheld an actual flush on the beauty's fair, impassive cheek, and had positively heard a smothered sigh from an admirably brought-up heart, no more given ordinarily to such weaknesses than the diamond-studded heart pendent from her bracelet, the belle's heart and the bracelet's heart being both formed alike, to fetch their price, and bid to do no more:—power of volition would have been as inconvenient in, and interfered as greatly with, the sale of one as of the other.

"She does like him!" sighed Lady Marabout over that Sabbath's luncheon wines. "It's always my fate—always; and Goodwood, never won before, will be thrown—actually thrown—away, as if he were the younger son of a Nobody!" which horrible waste was so terrible to her imagination that Lady Marabout could positively have shed tears at the bare prospect, and might have shed them, too, if the Hon. Val, the butler, two footmen, and a page had not inconveniently happened to be in the room at the time, so that she was driven to restrain her feelings and drink some Amontillado instead. Lady Marabout is not the first person by a good many who has had to smile over sherry with a breaking heart. Ah! lips have quivered as they laughed over Chambertin, and trembled as they touched the bowl of a champagne-glass. Wine has assisted at many a joyous festa enough, but some that has been drunk in gaiety has caught gleams, in the eyes of the drinkers, of salt water brighter than its brightest sparkles: water that no other eyes can see. Because we may drink Badminton laughingly when the gaze of Society the Non-Sympathetic is on us, do you think we must never have tasted any more bitter dregs? *Va-t'en, bécasse!* where have you lived? Nero does not always fiddle while Rome is burning from utter heartlessness, believe me, but rather—sometimes, perhaps—because his heart is aching!

"Goodwood will propose to-night, I fancy, he is so very attentive," thought Lady Marabout, sitting with her sister chaperones on the cosy causeuses of a mansion in Carlton-terrace, at one of the last balls of the departing season. "I never saw dear Valencia look better, and certainly her waltzing is——Ah! good evening, Major Cardonnel! Very warm to-night, is it not? I shall be so glad when I am down again at Fernditton. Town, in the first week of July, is really not habitable."

And she furled her fan, and smiled on him with her pleasant eyes, and couldn't help wishing he hadn't been on the Marchioness Rondeletia's visiting list, he *was* such a detrimental, and he was ten times handsomer than Goodwood!

"Will Miss Valletort leave you soon?" asked Cardonnel, sitting down by her.

"*Ah! monsieur, vous êtes là!*" thought Lady Marabout, as she answered, like a guarded diplomatist as she was, that it was not at all settled at present what her niece's post-season destiny would be, whether Devon or Fernditton, or the Spas, with her mother, Lady Honiton; and then unfurled her fan again, and chatted about Baden and her own indecision as to whether she should go there this September.

"May I ask you a question, and will you pardon me for its plainness?" asked Cardonnel, when she'd exhausted Baden's desirable and non-desirable points.

Lady Marabout shuddered as she bent her head, and thought, "The creature is never going to confide in me! He will win me over if he do, he looks so like his mother! And what shall I say to Adeliza?"

"Is your niece engaged to Goodwood or not?"

If ever a little fib was tempting to any lady, from Eve downward, it was tempting to Lady Marabout now. A falsehood would settle everything, send Cardonnel off the field, and clear all possibility of losing the "best match of the season." Besides, if not engaged to Goodwood actually to-night, Val would be, if she liked, to-morrow, or the next day, or before the week was over at the furthest—would it be such a falsehood after all? She coloured, she fidgeted her fan, she longed for the little fib!—how terribly tempting it looked! But Lady Marabout is a bad hand at prevarication, and she hates a lie, and she answered bravely, with a regretful twinge, "Engaged? No; not——"

"Not yet! Thank God!"

Lady Marabout stared at him, and at the words muttered under his moustaches:

"Really, Major Cardonnel, I do not see why you——"

"Should thank Heaven for it? Yet I do—it is a reprieve. Lady Marabout, you and my mother were close friends; will you listen to me for a second, while we are not overheard? That I have loved your niece—had the madness to love her, if you will—you cannot but have seen; that she has given me some reasonable encouragement it is no coxcombry to say, though I have known from the first what a powerful rival I had against me! but that Valencia loves me and does not love him, I believe—nay, I *know*. I have said nothing decided to her; when all hangs on a single die we shrink from hazarding the throw. But I must know my fate to-night. If she comes to you—as girls will, I believe sometimes—for countenance and council, will you stand my friend?—will you, for the sake of my friendship with your son, your friendship with my mother, support my cause, and uphold what I believe Valencia's heart will say in my favour?"

Lady Marabout was silent: no Andalusian ever worried her fan more ceaselessly in coquetry than she did in perplexity. Her heart was appealed to, and when that was enlisted Lady Marabout was lost!

"But—but—my dear Major Cardonnel, you are aware——" she began and stopped. I should suppose it may be a little awkward to tell a man to his face he is "not desirable!"

"I am aware that I cannot match with Goodwood. I am; but I know, also, that Goodwood's love cannot match with mine, and that your niece's affection is not his. That he may win her I know women too well not to fear, therefore I ask *you* to be my friend. If she refuse me, will you plead for me?—if she ask for counsel, will you give such as your own heart dictates (I ask no other)—and, will you remember that on Valencia's answer will rest the fate of a man's lifetime?"

He rose and left her, but the sound of his voice rang in Lady Marabout's ears, and the tears welled into her eyes: "Dear, dear! how like he looked to his poor dear mother! But what a position to place me in! Am I *never* to have any peace?"

Not at this ball, at any rate. Of all the worried chaperones and distracted duennas who hid their anxieties under pleasant smiles or affable lethargy, none were a quarter so miserable as Helena, Lady Marabout. Her heart and her head were enlisted on opposite sides; her wishes pulled one way, her sympathies another; her sense of justice to Cardonnel urged her to one side, her sense of duty to "dearest Adeliza" urged her to the other; her pride longed for one alliance, her heart yearned for the other. Cardonnel had confided in her and appealed to her; *sequitur*, Lady Marabout's honour would not allow her to go against him: yet, it was nothing short of grossest treachery to poor Adeliza, down there in Devon, expecting every day to congratulate her daughter on a prospective duchy won, to counsel Valencia to take one of these beggared Cardonnels, and, besides—to lose all her own laurels, to lose the capture of Goodwood!

No Guelphs and Ghibelines, no Royalists and Imperialists, ever fought so hard as Lady Marabout's divided duties.

"Valencia, Major Cardonnel spoke to me to-night," began that best-hearted and most badgered of ladies, as she sat before her dressing-room fire that night, alone with her niece.

Valencia smiled slightly, and a faint idea crossed Lady Marabout's mind that Valencia's smile was hardly a pleasant one, a trifle too much like the play of moonbeams on ice.

"He spoke to me about you."

"Indeed!"

"Perhaps you can guess, my dear, what he said?"

"I am no clairvoyante, aunt;" and Miss Val yawned a little, and held out one of her long slender feet to admire it.

"Every woman, my love, becomes half a clairvoyante when she is in love," said Lady Marabout, a little bit impatiently; she hadn't been brought up on the best systems herself, and though she admired the refrigeration (on principle), it irritated her just a little now and then. "Did he—did he say anything to *you* to-night?"

"Oh yes!"

"And what did you answer him, my love?"

"What would you advise me?"

Lady Marabout sighed, coughed, played nervously with the tassels of her peignoir, crumpled Bijou's ears with a reckless disregard to that priceless pet's feelings, and wished herself at the bottom of the Serpentine. Cardonnel had trusted her, she couldn't desert *him;* poor dear Adeliza had trusted her, she couldn't betray *her;* what was right to one would be wrong to the other, and to reconcile her divided duties with a Danaid's labour. For months she had worried her life out lest her advice should be asked, and now the climax was come, and asked it was.

"What a horrible position," thought Lady Marabout.

She waited and hesitated till the pendule had ticked off sixty seconds, then she summoned her courage and spoke:

"My dear, advice in such matters is often very harmful, and always very useless; plenty of people have asked my counsel, but I never knew any of them take it unless it chanced to chime in with their fancy. A woman's best adviser is her own heart, specially on such a subject as this. But before I give my opinion, may I ask if you have accepted him?"

Lady Marabout's heart throbbed quick and fast as she put the momentous question, with an agitation for which she would have blushed before her admirably nonchalante niece; but the tug of war was coming, and if Goodwood should be lost!

"You have accepted him?" she asked again.

"No! I—refused him."

The delicate rose went out of the Hon. Val's cheeks for once, and she breathed quickly and shortly.

Goodwood was *not* lost then!

Was she sorry—was she glad? Lady Marabout hardly knew; like Wellington, she felt the next saddest thing after a defeat is a victory.

"But you love him, Valencia?" she asked, half ashamed of suggesting such a weakness, to this glorious beauty.

The Hon. Val unclasped her necklet as if it were a chain choking her, and her face grew white and set: the coldest will feel on occasion, and all have *some* tender place that can wince at the touch.

"Perhaps; but such folly is best put aside at once. Certainly I prefer him to others, but to accept him would have been madness, absurdity. I told him so!"

"You told him so! If you had the heart to do so, Valencia, he has not lost much in losing you!" burst in Lady Marabout, her indignation getting the better of her judgment, and her heart, as usual, giving the coup-de-grace to her reason. "I am shocked at you! Every tender-hearted woman feels regret for affection she is obliged to repulse, even when she does not return it; and you who love this man——"

"Would you have had me accept him, aunt?"

"Yes," cried Lady Marabout, firmly, forgetting every vestige of "duty," and every possibility of dear Adeliza's vengeance, "if you love him, I would, decidedly. When I married my dear Philip's father he was what Cardonnel is, a cavalry man, as far off his family title then as Cardonnel is off his now."

"The more reason I should not imitate your imprudence, my dear aunt; death might not carry off the intermediate heirs quite so courteously in this case! No, I refused Major Cardonnel, and I did rightly; I should have repented it by now had I accepted him. There is nothing more silly than to be led away by romance. You De Boncœurs *are* romantic, you know; we Valletorts are happily free from the weakness. I am very tired, aunt, so good-night."

The Hon. Val went, the waxlight she carried shedding a paler shade on her handsome face, whiter and more set than usual, but held more proudly, as if it already wore the Doncaster coronet; and Lady Marabout sighed as she rang for her maid.

"Of course she acted wisely, and I ought to be very pleased; but that poor dear fellow!—his eyes *are* so like his mother's!"

"I congratulate you, mother, on a clear field. You've sent poor Arthur off very nicely," said Carruthers, the next morning, paying his general visit in her boudoir before the day began, which is much the same time in Town as in Greenland, and commences, whatever almanacks may say, about two or half-past P.M. "Cardonnel left this morning for Heaven knows where, and is going to exchange, Shelleto tells me, into the —th, which is ordered to Bengal, so *he* won't trouble you much more. When shall I be allowed to congratulate my cousin as the future Duchess of Doncaster?"

"Pray don't tease me, Philip. I've been vexed enough about your friend. When he came to me this morning, and asked me if there was no hope, and I was obliged to tell him there was none, I felt wretched," said Lady Marabout, as nearly pettishly as she ever said anything; "but I am really not responsible, not in the least. Besides, even you must admit that Goodwood is a much more desirable alliance, and if Valencia had accepted Cardonnel, pray what would all Belgravia have said? Why, that disappointed of Goodwood, she took the other out of pure pique! We owe something to Society, Philip, and something to ourselves!"

Carruthers laughed:

"Ah, my dear mother, you women will never be worth all you ought to be till you leave off kow-towing to 'what will be said,' and learn to defy that terrible oligarchy of the *Qu'en dira-t-on?*"

"When will Goodwood propose?" wondered Lady Marabout, fifty times a day, and Valencia Valletort wondered too. Whitebait was being eaten, and yachts being fitted, manned, and victualled, outstanding Ascot debts were being settled, and outstanding bills were being passed hurriedly through St. Stephen's; all the clockwork of the season was being wound up for the last time previous to a long stand-still, and going at a deuce of a pace, as if longing to run down and give its million wheels and levers peace; while everybody who'd anything to settle, whether monetary or matrimonial, personal or political, was making up his mind about it and getting it off his hands, and some men were being pulled up by wide-awake Jews to see what they were "made of," while others were pulled up by adroit dowagers to know what they had "meant," before the accounts of the season were scored out and settled. "Had Goodwood proposed?" asked all Belgravia. "Why hadn't Goodwood proposed?" asked Lady Marabout and Valencia. Twenty most favourable opportunities for the performance of that ceremony had Lady Marabout made for him "accidentally on purpose" the last fortnight; each of those times she had fancied the precious fish hooked and landed, and each time she had seen him free from the hook, floating on the surface of society.

"He *must* speak definitely to-morrow," thought Lady Marabout. But the larvæ of to-morrow burst into the butterfly of to-day, and to-day passed into the chrysalis of yesterday, and Goodwood was always very nearly caught and never *quite!*

"Come up stairs, Philip; I want to show you a little Paul Potter I bought the other day," said Lady Marabout, one morning, returning from a shopping expedition to Regent-street, meeting her son at her own door just descending from his tilbury. "Lord Goodwood calling, did you say, Soames? Oh, very well."

And Lady Marabout floated up the staircase, but signed to her footman to open the door, not of the drawing-room, but of her own boudoir.

"The Potter is in my own room, Philip; you must come in here if you wish to see it," said that adroit lady, for the benefit of Soames. But when the door was shut Lady Marabout lowered her voice confidentially: "The Potter isn't here, dear; I had it hung in the little cabinet through the drawing-rooms, but I don't wish to go up there for a few moments—you understand."

Carruthers threw himself in a chair, and laughed till the dogs Bijou, Bonbon, and Pandore all barked in a furious concert.

"I understand! So Goody's positively coming to the point up there, is he?"

"No doubt he is," said Lady Marabout, reprovingly. "Why else should he come in when I was not at home? There is nothing extraordinary in it. The only thing I have wondered at is his having delayed so long."

"If a man had to hang himself, would you wonder he put off pulling the bolt?"

"I don't see any point in your jests at all!" returned Lady Marabout. "There is nothing ridiculous in winning such a girl as Valencia."

"No; but the question here is not of winning her, but of buying her. The price is a little high—a ducal coronet and splendid settlements, a wedding-ring and bondage for life; but he will buy her, nevertheless. Cardonnel couldn't pay the first half of the price, and so he was swept out of the auction-room. You are shocked, mother? Ah, truth *is* shocking sometimes, and always *maladroit;* one oughtn't to bring it into ladies' boudoirs."

"Hold your tongue, Philip! I will not have you so satirical. Where do you take it from? Not from me, I am sure! Hark! there is Goodwood going! That is his step on the stairs, I think! Dear me, Philip, I wish you sympathised with me a little more, for I *do* feel happy, and I can't help it; dear Adeliza will be so gratified."

"My dear mother, I'll do my best to be sympathetic; I'll go and congratulate Goodwood as he gets in his cab, if you fancy I ought; but you see, if I were in Dahomey, beholding the head of my best friend coming off, I couldn't quite get up the amount of sympathy in their pleasure at the refreshing sight the Dahomites might expect from me, and so——"

But Lady Marabout missed the comparison of herself to a Dahomite, for she had opened the door and was crossing to the drawing-rooms, her eyes bright, her step elastic, her heart exultant at the triumph of her manœuvres. The Hon. Val was playing with some ferns in an étagère at the bottom of the farthest room, and responded to the kiss her aunt bestowed on her about as much as if she had been one of the statuettes on the consoles.

"Well, love, *What did he say?*" asked Lady Marabout, breathlessly, with eager delight and confident anticipation.

Like drops of ice on warm rose-leaves fell each word of the intensely chill and slightly sulky response on Lady Marabout's heart.

"He said that he goes to Cowes to-morrow for the Royal Yacht Squadron dinner, and then on in the *Anadyomene* to the Spitzbergen coast for walruses. He left a P.P.C. card for you."

"*Walruses!*" shrieked Lady Marabout.

"Walruses," responded the Hon. Val.

"And said no more than that?"

"No more than that."

The Pet Eligible had flown off uncaught after all! Lady Marabout needed no further explanation—*tout fut dit.* They were both silent and paralysed. Do you suppose Pompey and Cornelia had much need of words when they met at Lesbos after the horrible déroute of Pharsalia?

"I'm in your mother's blackest books for ever, Phil," said Goodwood to Carruthers in the express to Southampton for the R.Y.C. Squadron Regatta of that year, "but I can't help it. It's no good to badger us into marriage; it only makes us double, and run to earth. I *was* near compromising myself with your cousin, I grant, but the thing that chilled me was, she's too *studied.* It's all got up beforehand, and goes upon clockwork, and it don't interest one accordingly; the mechanism's perfect, but we know when it will raise its hand, and move its eyes, and bow its head, and when we've looked at its beauty once we get tired of it. That's the fault in Valencia, and in scores of them, and as long as they *won't* be natural, why, they can't have much chance with us!"

Which piece of advice Carruthers, when he next saw his mother, repeated to her, for the edification of all future débutantes, adding a small sermon of his own:

"My dear mother, I ask you, is it to be expected that we can marry just to oblige women and please the newspapers? Would you have me marched off to Hanover-square because it would be a kindness to take one of Lady Elmer's marriageable daughters, or because a leading journal fills up an empty column with farcical lamentation on our dislike to the bondage? Of course you wouldn't; yet, for no better reason, you'd have chained poor Goodwood, if you could have caught him. Whether a man likes to marry or not is certainly his own private business, though just now its made a popular public discussion. Do you wonder that we shirk the institution? If we have not fortune, marriage cramps our energies, our resources, our ambitions, loads us with petty cares, and trebles our anxieties. To one who rises with such a burden on his shoulders, how many sink down in obscurity, who, but for the leaden weight of pecuniary difficulties with which marriage has laden their feet, might have climbed the highest round in the social ladder? On the other side, if we have fortune, if we have the unhappy happiness to be eligible, is it wonderful that we are not flattered by the worship of young ladies who love us for what we shall give them, that we don't feel exactly honoured by being courted for what we are worth, and that we're not over-willing to give up our liberty to oblige those who look on us only as good speculations? What think you, eh?"

Lady Marabout looked up and shook her head mournfully:

"My dear Philip, you are right. I see it—I don't dispute it; but when a thing becomes personal, you know philosophy becomes difficult. I have such letters from poor dear Adeliza—such letters! Of course she thinks it is all my fault, and I believe she will break entirely with me. It is so very shocking. You see all Belgravia coupled their names, and the very day that he went off to Cowes in that heartless, abominable manner, if an announcement of the alliance as arranged did not positively appear in the *Court Circular!* It did indeed! I am sure Anne Hautton was at the bottom of it; it would be just like her. Perhaps poor Valencia cannot be pitied after her treatment of Cardonnel, but it is very hard on *me.*"

Lady Marabout is right: when a thing becomes personal, philosophy becomes difficult. When your gun misses fire, and a fine cock bird whirrs up from the covert and takes wing unharmed, never to swell the number of your triumphs and the size of your game-bag, could you by any chance find it in your soul to sympathise with the bird's gratification at your mortification and its own good luck? I fancy not.

LADY MARABOUT'S TROUBLES;

OR,

THE WORRIES OF A CHAPERONE.

IN THREE SEASONS.

SEASON THE SECOND.—THE OGRE.

"If there be one class I dislike more than another, it is that class; and if there be one person in town I utterly detest, it is that man!" said our friend Lady Marabout, with much unction, one morning, to an audience consisting of Bijou, Bonbon, and Pandore, a cockatoo, an Angora cat, and a young lady sitting in a rocking-chair, reading the magazines of the month. The dogs barked, the cockatoo screamed, the cat purred, a vehement affirmative, the human auditor looked up, and laughed:

"What is the class, Lady Marabout, may I ask?"

"Those clever, detestable, idle, good-for-nothing, fashionable, worthless men about town, who have not a penny to their fortune, and spend a thousand a year on gloves and scented tobacco—who are seen at everybody's house, and never at their own—who drive horses fit for a Duke's stud, and haven't money enough to keep a donkey on thistles—who have handsome faces and brazen consciences—who are positively leaders of ton, and yet are glad to write feuilletons before the world is up to pay their stall at the Opera—who give a guinea for a bouquet, and can't pay a shilling of their just debts—I detest the class, my dear!"

"So it seems, Lady Marabout. I never heard you so vehement. And who is the particular scapegoat of this type of sinners?"

"Chandos Cheveley."

"Chandos Cheveley? Is n't he that magnificent man Sir Philip introduced to me at the Amandines' breakfast yesterday? Why, Lady Marabout, his figure alone might outbalance a multitude of sins!"

"He is handsome enough. *Did* Philip introduce him to you, my dear? I wonder! It was very careless of him. But men *are* so thoughtless; they will know anybody themselves, and they think we may do the same. The man called here while we were driving this morning. I am glad we were out: he very seldom comes to *my* house."

"But why is he so dreadful? The Amandines are tremendously exclusive, I thought."

"Oh, he goes everywhere! No party is complete without Chandos Cheveley, and I have heard that at September or Christmas he has more invitations than he could possibly accept; but he is a most objectionable man, all the same—a man every one dreads to see come near her daughters. He has extreme fascination of manner, but he has not a farthing! How he lives, dresses, drives the horses he does, is one of those miracles of London men's lives which *we* can never hope to puzzle out. Philip says he likes him, but Philip never speaks ill of anybody, except a woman now and then, who teases him; but the man is my detestation—has been for years. I was annoyed to see his card: it is the first time he has called this season. He knows I can't endure his class or him."

With which Lady Marabout wound up a very unusually lengthy and uncharitable disquisition, length and uncharitableness being both out of her line; and Lady Cecil Ormsby rolled her handkerchief into a ball, threw it across the room for Bonbon, the spaniel puppy, and laughing till the cockatoo screamed with delight:

"Dear Lady Marabout, do forgive me, but it is such fun to hear you positively, for once, malicious! Who is your Ogre, genealogically speaking? this terrible—what's his name?—Chandos Cheveley?"

"The younger son of a younger son of one of the Marquises of Danvers, I believe, my dear; an idle man about town, you know, with not a sou to be idle upon, who sets the fashion, but never pays his tailor. I am never malicious, I hope, but I do consider men of that stamp very objectionable."

"But what is Sir Philip but a man about town?"

"My son! Of course he is a man about town. My dear, what else should he be? But if Philip likes to lounge all his days away in a club window, he has a perfect right; he has fortune. Chandos Cheveley is not worth a farthing, and yet yawns away his day in White's as if he were a millionnaire; the one can support his *far niente*, the other cannot. There are gradations in everything, my love, but in nothing more than among the men, of the same set and the same style, whom one sees in Pall-Mall."

"There are chestnut horses and horse-chestnuts, chevaliers and chevaliers d'industrie, rois and rois d'Yvetot, Carrutherses and Chandos Cheveleys?" laughed Lady Cecil. "I understand, Lady Marabout. Il y a femmes et femmes—men about town and men about town. I shall learn all the classes and distinctions soon. But how is one to know the sheep that may be let into the fold from the wolves in sheep's clothing, that must be kept out of it? Your Ogre is really very distinguished-looking."

"Distinguished? Oh yes, my love; but the most distinguished men are the most objectionable sometimes. I assure you, my dear Cecil, I have seen an elder son whom sometimes I could hardly have told from his own valet, and a younger of the same family with the style of a D'Orsay. Why, did I not this very winter, when I went to stay at Rochdale, take Fitzbreguet himself, whom I had not chanced to see since he was a child, for one of the men out of livery, and bid him bring Bijou's basket out of the carriage. I did indeed—*I*, who hate such mistakes more than any one! And Lionel, his second brother, has the beauty of an Apollo and the *air noble* to perfection. One often sees it; it's through the doctrine of compensation, I suppose, but it's very perplexing, and causes endless *embrouillements*."

"When the mammas fall in love with Lord Fitz's coronet, and the daughters with Lord Lionel's face, I suppose?" interpolated Lady Cecil.

"Exactly so, dear. As for knowing the sheep from the wolves, as you call them," went on Lady Marabout, sorting her embroidery silks, "you may very soon know more of Chandos Cheveley's class—(this Magenta braid is good for nothing; it's a beautiful colour, but it fades immediately)—you meet them in the country at all fast houses, as they call them now-a-days, like the Amandines'; they are constantly invited, because they are so amusing, or so dead a shot, or so good a whip, and live on their invitations, because they have no *locale* of their own. You see, all the women worth nothing admire, and all the women worth anything shun, them. They have a dozen accomplishments, and not a single reliable quality; a hundred houses open to them, and not a shooting-box of their own property or rental. You will meet this Chandos Cheveley everywhere, for instance, as though he were somebody desirable. You will see him in his club window, as though he were born only to read the papers; in the Ride, mounted on a much better animal than Fitzbreguet, though the one pays treble the price he ought, and the other, I dare say, no price at all; at Ascot, on Amandine's or Goodwood's drag, made as much of among them all as if he were an heir-apparent to the throne; and yet, my love, that man hasn't a penny, lives Heaven knows where, and how he gets money to keep his cab and buy his gloves is, as I say, one of those mysteries of settling days, whist-tables, periodical writing, Baden *coups de bonheur*, and such-like fountains of such men's fortunes which *we* can never hope to penetrate—and very little we should benefit if we could! My dearest Cecil! if it is not ten minutes to five! We must go and drive at once."

Lady Ormsby was a great pet of Lady Marabout's; she had been so from a child; so much so, that when, the year after Valencia Valletort's discomfiture (a discomfiture so heavy and so public, that that young beauty was seized with a fit of filial devotion, attended her mamma to Nice, and figured not in Belgravia the ensuing season, and even Lady Marabout's temper had been slightly soured by it, as you perceive), another terrible charge was shifted on her shoulders by an appeal from the guardians of the late Earl of Rosediamond's daughter for her to be brought out under the Marabout wing, she had consented, and surrendered herself to be again a martyr to responsibility for the sake of Cecil and Cecil's lost mother. The young lady was a beauty; she was worse, she was an heiress; she was worse still, she was saucy, wayward, and notable for a strong will of her own—a more dangerous young thorough-bred was never brought to a gentler Rarey; and yet she was the first charge of this nature that Lady Marabout had ever accepted in the whole course of her life with no misgivings and with absolute pleasure. First, she was very fond of Cecil Ormsby; secondly, she longed to efface her miserable failure with Valencia by a brilliant success, which should light up all the gloom of her past of chaperonage; thirdly, she had a sweet and long-cherished diplomacy nestling in her heart to throw her son and Lord Rosediamond's daughter together, for the eventual ensnaring and fettering of Carruthers, which policy nothing could favour so well as having the weapon for that deadly purpose in her own house through April, May, and June.

Cecil Ormsby was a beauty and an heiress—spirited, sarcastic, brilliant, wilful, very proud; altogether, a more spirited young filly never needed a tight hand on the ribbons, a light but a firm seat, and a temperate though judicious use of the curb to make her endure being ridden at all, even over the most level grass countries of life. And yet, for the reasons just mentioned, Lady Marabout, who never had a tight hand upon anything, who is to be thrown in a moment by any wilful kick or determined plunge, who is utterly at the mercy of any filly that chooses to take the bit between her own teeth and bolt off, and is entirely incapable of using the curb, even to the most ill-natured and ill-trained Shetland that ever deserved to have its mouth sawed—Lady Marabout undertook the jockeyship without fear.

"I dare say you wonder, after my grief with Valencia, that I have consented to bring another girl out, but when I heard it was poor Rosediamond's wish—his dying wish, one may almost say—that Cecil should make her début with me, what *was* I to do, my dear?" she explained, half apologetically, to Carruthers, when the question was first agitated. Perhaps, too, Lady Marabout had in her heart been slightly sickened of perfectly trained young ladies brought up on the best systems, and admitted to herself that the pets of the foreign houses may *not* be the most attractive flowers after all.

So Lady Cecil Ormsby was installed in Lowndes-square, and though she was the inheritor of her mother's wealth, which was considerable, and possessor of her own wit and beauty, which were not inconsiderable either, and therefore a prize to fortune-hunters and a lure to misogamists, as Lady Marabout knew very well how to keep the first off, and had her pet project of numbering her refractory son among the converted second, she rather congratulated herself than otherwise in having the pleasure and éclat of introducing her; and men voted the Marabout Yearlings, Sale of that season, since it comprised Rosediamond's handsome daughter, as dangerous as a horse-dealer's auction to a young greenhorn, or a draper's "sale without reserve, at enormous sacrifice," to a lady with a soul on bargains bent.

"How very odd! Just as we have been talking of him, there is that man again! I must bow to him, I suppose; though if there *be* a person I dislike——" said Lady Marabout, giving a frigid little bend of her head as her barouche, with its dashing roans, rolled from her door, and a tilbury passed them, driving slowly through the square.

Cecil Ormsby bowed to its occupant with less severity, and laughed under the sheltering shadow of her white parasol fringe.

"The Ogre has a very pretty trap, though, Lady Marabout, and the most delicious grey horse in it! Such good action!"

"If its action is good, my love, I dare say it is more than could be said of its master's actions. He is going to call on that Mrs. Maréchale, very probably; he was always there last season."

And Lady Marabout shook her head and looked grave, which, combined with the ever-damnatory demonstrative conjunction, blackened Mrs. Maréchale's moral character as much as Lady Marabout could blacken any one's, she loving as little to soil her own fingers and her neighbours' reputations with the indelible Italian chalk of scandal as any lady I know; being given, on the contrary, when compelled to draw any little social croquis of a backbiting nature, to sketch them in as lightly as she could, take out as many lights as possible, and rub in the shadows with a very chary and pitying hand, except, indeed, when she took the portrait of such an Ogre as Chandos Cheveley, when I can't say she was quite so merciful, specially when policy and prejudice combined to suggest that it would be best (and not unjust) to use the blackest Conté crayons obtainable.

The subject of it would not have denied the correctness of the silhouette Lady Marabout had snipped out for the edification of Lady Cecil, had he caught a glimpse of it: he had no habitation, nor was ever likely to have any, save a bachelor's suite in a back street; he had been an idle man for the last twenty years, with not a sou to be idle upon; the springs of his very precarious fortunes, his pursuits, habits, reputation, ways and means, were all much what she had described them; yet he set the fashion much oftener than Goodwood, and Dukes and millionnaires would follow the style of his tie, or the shape of his hat; he moved in the most brilliant circles as Court Circulars have it, and all the best houses were open to him. At his Grace of Amandine's, staying there for the shooting, he would alter the stud, find fault with the claret, arrange a Drive for deer in the forest, and flirt with her Grace herself, as though, as Lady Marabout averred, he had been Heir-Apparent or Prince Regent, who honoured the Castle by his mere presence—Amandine all the while swearing by every word he spoke, thinking nothing well done without Chevcley, and submitting to be set aside in his own Castle, with the greatest gratification at the extinction.

But that Chandos Cheveley was not worth a farthing, that he was but a Bohemian on a brilliant scale, that any day he might disappear from that society where he now glittered, never to reappear, everybody knew; how he floated there as he did, kept his cab and his man, paid for his stall at the Opera, his club fees, and all the other trifles that won't wait, was an eternal puzzle to every one ignorant of how expensively one may live upon nothing if one just gets the knack, and of how far a fashionable reputation, like a cake of chocolate, will go to support life when nothing more substantial is obtainable. Lady Marabout had sketched him correctly enough, allowing for a little politic bitterness thrown in to counteract Carruthers's thoughtlessness in having introduced him to Rosediamond's daughter (that priceless treasure for whom Lady Marabout would fain have had a guard of Janissaries, if they would not have been likely to look singular and come expensive); and ladies of the Marabout class did look upon him as an Ogre, guarded their daughters from his approach at a ball as carefully, if not as demonstratively, as any duck its ducklings from the approach of a water-rat, did not ask him to their dinners, and bowed to him chillily in the Ring. Others regarded him as harmless, from his perfect pennilessness; what danger was there in the fascinations of a man whom all Belgravia knew hadn't money enough to buy dog-skin gloves, though he always wore the best Paris lavender kid? While others, the pretty married women chiefly, from her Grace of Amandine downwards to Mrs. Maréchale, of Lowndes-square, flirted with him fearfully, and considered Chandos Cheveley what nobody ever succeeded in disproving him, the most agreeable man on town, with the finest figure, the best style, and the most perfect bow, to be seen in the Park any day between March and July. But then, as Lady Marabout remarked on a subsequent occasion, a figure, a style, and a bow are admirable and enviable things, but they're not among the cardinal virtues, and don't do to live upon; and though they're very good buoys to float one on the smooth sparkling sea of society, if there come a storm one may go down, despite them, and become helpless prey to the sharks waiting below.

"Philip certainly admires her very much; he said the other day there was something in her, and that means a great deal from him," thought Lady Marabout, complacently, as she and Cecil Ormsby were wending their way through some crowded rooms. "Of course I shall not influence Cecil towards him; it would not be honourable to do so, since she might look for a higher title than my son's; still, if it should so fall out, nothing would give me greater pleasure, and really nothing would seem more natural with a little judicious manage——"

"May I have the honour of this valse with you?" was spoken in, though not to, Lady Marabout's ear. It was a soft, a rich, a melodious voice enough, and yet Lady Marabout would rather have heard the hiss of a Cobra Capella, for the footman *might* have caught the serpent and carried it off from Cecil Ormsby's vicinity, and she couldn't very well tell them to rid the reception-chambers of Chandos Cheveley.

Lady Marabout vainly tried to catch Cecil's eye, and warn her of the propriety of an utter and entire repudiation of the valse in question, if there were no "engaged" producible to softly chill the hopes and repulse the advances of the aspirant; but Lady Cecil's soul was obstinately bent saltatorywards; her chaperone's ocular telegram was lost upon her, and only caught by the last person who should have seen it, who read the message off the wires to his own amusement, but naturally was not magnanimous enough to pass it on.

"I ought to have warned her never to dance with that detestable man. If I could but have caught her eye even now!" thought Lady Marabout, restlessly. The capella *would* have been much the more endurable of the two; the serpent couldn't have passed its arm round Rosediamond's priceless daughter and whirled her down the ball-room to the music of Coote and Timney's band, as Chandos Cheveley was now doing.

"Why did *you* not ask her for that waltz, Philip?" cried the good lady, almost petulantly.

Carruthers opened his eyes wide.

"My dear mother, you know I never dance! I come to balls to oblige my hostesses and look at the women, but not to carry a seven-stone weight of tulle illusion and white satin, going at express pace, with the thermometer at 80 deg., and a dense crowd jostling one at every turn in the circle. *Bien obligé!* that's not my idea of pleasure; if it were the Pyrrhic dance, now, or the Tarantella, or the Bolero, under a Castilian chestnut-tree——"

"Hold your tongue! You might have danced for once, just to have kept her from Chandos Cheveley."

"From the best waltzer in London? Not so selfish. Ask Amandine's wife if women don't like to dance with that fellow!"

"I should be very sorry to mention his name to her, or any of her set," responded Lady Marabout, getting upon certain virtuous stilts of her own, which she was given to mount on rare occasions and at distant intervals, always finding them very uncomfortable and unsuitable elevations, and being as glad to cast them off as a traveller to kick off the *échasses* he has had to strap on over the sandy plains of the Landes.

"What could possess you to introduce him to Cecil, Philip? It was careless, silly, unlike you: you know how I dislike men of his—his—objectionable stamp," sighed Lady Marabout, the white and gold namesakes in her coiffure softly trembling a gentle sigh in the perfumy zephyr raised by the rotatory whirl of the waltzers, among whom she watched with a horrible fascination, as one watches a tiger being pugged out of its lair, or a deserter being led out to be shot, Chandos Cheveley waltzing Rosediamond's priceless daughter down the ball-room.

"He is so dreadfully handsome! I wonder why it is that men and women, who have no fortune but their faces, will be so dangerously, so obstinately, so provokingly attractive as one sees them so often!" thought Lady Marabout, determining to beat an immediate retreat from the present salons, since they were infested by the presence of her Ogre, to Lady Hautton's house in Wilton-crescent.

Lady Hautton headed charitable bazaars, belonged to the Cummingite nebulæ, visited Homes and Hospitals (floating to the bedside of luckless feminine patients to read out divers edifying passages, whose effect must have been somewhat neutralised to the hearers, one would imagine by the envy-inspiring rustle of her silks, the flash of her rings, and the chimes of her bracelets, chains, and châtelaine), looked on the "Amandine set" as lost souls, and hence "did not know" Chandos Cheveley—a fact which, though the Marabout and Hautton antagonism was patent to all Belgravia, served to endear her all at once to her foe! Lady Marabout, like a good many other people, being content to sink personal resentment, and make a truce with the infidels for the sake of enjoying a mutual antipathy—that closest of all links of union!

Lady Marabout and Lady Hautton were foes, but they were dear Helena and dear Anne, all the same; dined at each other's tables, and smiled in each other's faces. They might be private foes, but they were public friends! and Lady Marabout beat a discreet retreat to the Hautton's salons—"so many engagements" is so useful a plea!—and from the Hautton she passed on to a ball at the Duke of Doncaster's; and, as at both, if Lady Cecil Ormsby did not move "a goddess from above," she moved a brilliant, sparkling, nonchalante, dangerous beauty, with some of her sex's faults, all her sex's witcheries, and more than her sex's mischief, holding her own royally, saucily, and proudly, and Chandos Cheveley was encountered no more, but happily detained at a petit souper in a certain Section of the French Embassy, Lady Marabout drove homewards, in the grey of the morning, relieved, complacent, and gratified, dozing deliciously, till she was woke up with a start:

"Lady Marabout, what a splendid waltzer your Ogre, Chandos Cheveley, is!"

Lady Marabout opened her eyes with a jerk that set her feathers trembling, her diamonds scintillating, and her bracelets ringing an astonished little carillon.

"My love, how you frightened me!"

Cecil Ormsby laughed—a gay, joyous laugh, innocent of having disturbed a doze, a lapse into the human weakness of which her chaperone never permitted herself to plead guilty.

"Frightened you, did I? Why your *bête noire* is as terrible to you as Cœur de Lion to the Saracen children, or Black Douglass to the Lowland! And, really I can't see anything terrible in him; he is excessively brilliant and agreeable, has something worth hearing to say to you, and his waltzing is——!"

Lady Cecil Ormsby had not a word in her repertory—though it was an enthusiastic and comprehensive one, and embraced five languages—sufficiently commendatory to finish her sentence.

"I dare say, dear. I never denied, or heard denied, his having every accomplishment under the sun. The only pity is, he has nothing more substantial!" returned Lady Marabout, a little bit tartly for *her* lips, only used to the softest (and most genuine) milk of roses.

Lord Rosediamond's daughter laughed a little mournfully, and played with her fan.

"Poor man! Brilliant and beggared, fashionable and friendless, courted and cashiered—a sad destiny. Do you know, Lady Marabout, I have half a mind to champion your Ogre!"

"My love, don't talk nonsense!" said Lady Marabout, hastily; at which Lady Cecil only laughed still more softly and gaily again, and sprang down as the carriage stopped in Lowndes-square.

"Rosediamond's daughter's deucedly handsome, eh, Cheveley? I saw you waltzing with her last night," said Goodwood at Lord's the next morning, watching a match between the Household Cavalry and the Zingari Eleven.

"Yes, she is the best thing we have seen for some time," said Cheveley, glancing round to see if the Marabout liveries were on the ground.

"Don't let the Amandine or little Meréchale hear you say so, or you'll have a deuce of a row," laughed Goodwood. "She's worth a good deal, too; she's all her mother's property, and that's something, I know. The deaths in her family have kept her back two years or more, but now she *is* out, I dare say Lady Tattersall will put her up high in the market."

"No doubt. Why don't *you* make the investment—she's much more attractive than that Valletort ice statue who hooked you so nearly last year? Fortescue's out! Well done, little Jimmy! Ah! there's the Marabout carriage. I am as unwelcome to that good lady, I know, as if I were Quasimodo or Quilp, and as much to be shunned, in her estimation, as Vidocq, armed to the teeth; nevertheless, I shall go and talk to them, if only in revenge for the telegraphic warning of 'dangerous' she shot at Lady Cecil last night when I asked her to waltz. Goodwood, don't you envy me my happy immunity from traps matrimonial?"

"There is that man again—how provoking! I wish we had not come to see Philip's return match. He is positively coming up to talk to us," thought Lady Marabout, restlessly, as her Ogre lifted his hat to her. In vain did she do her best to look severe, to look frigid, to chill him with a withering "good morning" (a little word, capable, if you notice, of expressing every gradation in feeling, from the nadir of delighted intimacy to the zero of rebuking frigidity); her coldest ice was as warm as a pine-apple ice that has been melting all day under a refreshment tent at a horticultural fête! Her *rôle* was *not* chilliness, and never could be; she would have beamed benign on a headsman who had led her out to instant decapitation, and been no more able to help it than a peach to help its bloom, or a claret its bouquet. She did her utmost to freeze Chandos Cheveley, but either she failed signally, or he, being blessed with the brazen conscience she had attributed to him, was steeled to all the tacit repulses of her looks, for he leaned against the barouche door, let her freeze him away as she might, and chatted to Cecil Ormsby, "positively," Lady Marabout remarked to that safest confidante, herself, "positively as if the man had been welcome at my house for the last ten years! If Cecil *would* but second me, he couldn't do it; but she *will* smile and talk with him just as though he were Goodwood or Fitzbreguet! It is very disagreeable to be forced against one's will like this into countenancing such a very objectionable person; and yet what *can* one do!"

Which query she could by no means satisfactorily answer herself, being a regular female Nerva for clemency, utterly incapable of the severity with which that stern Cataline, Lady Hautton, would have signed the unwelcome intruder out of the way in a brace of seconds. And under Nerva's gentle rule, though Nerva was longing with all her heart to have the courage to call the lictors, and say, "Away with him!" Cheveley leaned against the door of the carriage unmolested, though decidedly undesired by one of its occupants, talked to by Lady Cecil, possibly because she found him as agreeable as her Grace of Amandine and Lillia Meréchale had done before her, possibly only from that rule of contrariety which is such a pet motor-power with her sex; and Lady Marabout reclined among her cushions, tucked up in her tiger-skin in precisely that state of mind in which Fuseli said to his wife, "Swear, my dear, you don't know how much good it will do you," dreading in herself the possible advent of the Hautton carriage, for that ancient enemy and rigid pietist, of whose keen tongue and eminent virtue she always stood secretly in awe, to see this worthless and utterly objectionable member of that fast, graceless, and "very incorrect" Amandine set, absolutely *en sentinelle* at the door of her barouche!

Does your best friend *ever* come when you want him most? Doesn't your worst foe *always* come when you want him least? Of course, at that juncture, the Hautton carriage came on the ground (Hautton was one of the Zingari Club, and maternal interest brought her foe to Lord's as it had brought herself), and the Hautton eye-glass, significantly and surprisedly raised, said as distinctly to Lady Marabout, as though elfishly endowed with vocal powers, "You allow *that* man acquaintance with Rosediamond's daughter!" Lady Marabout was stung to the soul by the deserved rebuke, but she didn't know how on earth to get rid of the sinner! There he leaned, calmly, nonchalantly, determinedly, as if he were absolutely welcome; and Lady Cecil talked on to him as if he were absolutely welcome too.

Lady Marabout felt branded in the eyes of all Belgravia to have Chandos Cheveley at her carriage door, the most objectionable man of all his most objectionable class.

"It is very strange!" she thought. "I have seen that man about town the last five-and-twenty years—ever since he was a mere boy, taken up and petted by Adeline Patchouli for some piece of witty Brummelian impudence he said to her on his first introduction—and he has never sought my acquaintance before, but always seemed to be quite aware of my dislike to him and all his set. It is very grievous he should have chosen the very season I have poor dear Rosediamond's daughter with me; but it is always my fate—if a thing *can* happen to annoy me it always will!"

With which Lady Marabout, getting fairly distracted under the iron hand of adverse fate, and the ruthless surveillance of the Hautton glass, invented an impromptu necessity for immediate shopping at Lewis and Allonby's, and drove off the ground at the sole moment of interest the match possessed for her—viz. when Carruthers was rattling down Hautton's stumps, and getting innings innumerable for the Household.

"Mais ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte;" the old proverb's so true we wear it threadbare with repeating it! Lady Marabout might as well have stayed on Lord's ground, and not lacerated her feelings by leaving at the very hour of the Household Cavalry's triumphs, for any good that she did thereby. The Hautton eye-glass had lighted on Chandos Cheveley, and Chandos Cheveley's eye-glass on Rosediamond's daughter;—and Cecil Ormsby arched her eyebrows, and gave her parasol a little impatient shake as they quitted Lord's.

"Lady Marabout, I never could have believed you ill natured; you interrupted my ball last night, and my conversation this morning! I shall scold you if you ever do so again. And now tell me (as curiosity is a weakness incidental to all women, no woman ought to refuse to relieve it in another) why *are* you so prejudiced against that very handsome, and very amusing person?"

"Prejudiced, my dear child! I am not in the least prejudiced," returned Lady Marabout. (Nobody ever admitted to a prejudice that *I* ever heard. It's a plant that grows in all gardens, and is sedulously matted up, watered, and strengthened; but invariably disavowed by its sturdiest cultivators.) "As for

Chandos Cheveley, I merely mentioned to you what all town knows about him; and the dislike I have to his class is one of principle, not of prejudice."

Lady Cecil made a *moue mutine:*

"Oh, Lady Marabout! if you go to 'principle,' *tout est perdu!* 'Principle' has been made to bear the onus of every private pique since the world began, and has had to answer for more cruelties and injustice than any word in the language. The Romans flung the Christians to the lions 'on principle,' and the Europeans slew the Mahomedans 'on principle,' and 'principle' lighted the autos-da-fé, and signed to the tormentor to give a turn more to the rack! Please don't appeal to anything so severe and hypocritical. Come, what are the Ogre's sins?"

Lady Marabout laughed, despite the subject.

"Do you think I am a compiler of such catalogues, my love? Pray do not let us talk any more about Chandos Cheveley, he is very little worth it; all I say to you is, be as cool to him as you can, without rudeness, of course. I am never at home when he calls, and were I you I would be always engaged when he asked you to waltz; his acquaintance can in no way benefit you."

Lady Cecil gave a little haughty toss of her head, and lay back in the barouche.

"*I* will judge of that! I am not made for fetters of any kind, you know, and I like to choose my own acquaintance as well as to choose my own dresses. I cannot obey you either this evening, for he asked me to put him on my tablets for the first waltz at Lord Anisette's ball, and I consented. I had no 'engaged' ready, unless I had had a falsehood ready too, and *you* wouldn't counsel that, Lady Marabout, I am very sure?"

With that straightforward and perplexing question Cecil Ormsby successfully silenced her chaperone, by planting her in that disagreeable position known as between the horns of a dilemma; and Lady Marabout, shrinking alike from the responsibility of counselling a "necessary equivocation," as society politely terms its indispensable lies, and the responsibility of allowing Cecil acquaintance with the "very worst" of the Amandine set, sighed, wondered envyingly how Anne Hautton would act in her place, and almost began to wish somebody else had had the onerous stewardship of that brilliant and priceless jewel Rosediamond's daughter, now that the jewel threatened to be possessed with a will of its own:—the greatest possible flaw in a gem of pure water, which they only want to scintillate brilliantly among the bijouterie of society, and let itself be placed passively in the setting most suitable for it that can be conceived in the eyes of lady lapidaries entrusted with its sale.

"It is very odd," thought Lady Marabout; "she seems to have taken a much greater fancy to that odious man than to Philip, or Goodwood, or Fritz, or any one of the men who admire her so much. I suppose I always *am* to be worried in this sort of way. However, there can be no real danger; Chandos Cheveley is the merest butterfly flirt, and with all his faults none ever accused him of fortune-hunting. Still, they say he is wonderfully fascinating, and certainly he has the most beautiful voice I ever heard; and if Cecil should ever like him at all I could never forgive myself, and what *should* I say to General Ormsby?"

The General, Cecil's uncle and guardian, is one of the best-humoured, best-tempered, and most *laissez-faire* men in the Service, but was, for all that, a perpetual dead weight on Lady Marabout's mind just then, for was not he the person to whom, at the end of the season, she would have to render up an account of the successes and the short-comings of her chaperone's career?

"Do you think of proposing Chandos Cheveley as a suitable alliance for Cecil Ormsby, my dear Helena?" asked Lady Hautton, with that smile which was felt to be considerably worse than strychnine by her foes and victims, at a house in Grosvenor-place, that night.

"God forbid!" prayed Lady Marabout, mentally, as she joined in the Hautton laugh, and shivered under the stab of the Hautton sneer, which was an excessively sharp one, Lady Hautton being one of a rather numerous class of eminent Christians, so panoplied in the armour of righteousness that they can tread, without feeling it, on the tender feet of others.

The evening was spoiled to Lady Marabout; she felt morally and guiltily responsible for an unpardonable indiscretion:—with that man waltzing with Cecil Ormsby, her "graceful, graceless, gracious Grace" of Amandine visibly irritated with jealousy at the sight, and Anne Hautton whispering behind her fan with acidulated significance. Lady Marabout had never been more miserable in her life! She heard on all sides admiration of Rosediamond's daughter; she was gratified by seeing Goodwood, Fitzbreguet, Fulke

Nugent, every eligible man in the room, suing for a place on her tablets; she had the delight of beholding Carruthers positively join the negligent beauty's train; and yet the night was a night of purgatory to Lady Marabout, for Chandos Cheveley had his first waltz, and several after it, and the Amandine set were there to gossip, and the Hautton clique to be shocked, at it.

"Soames, tell Mason, when Mr. Chandos Cheveley calls, I am not at home," said Lady Marabout, at breakfast.

"Yes, my lady," said Soames, who treasured up the order, and told it to Mr. Chandos Cheveley's man at the first opportunity, though, greatly to his honour, we must admit, he did *not* imitate the mild formula of fib, and tell his mistress her claret was not corked when it was so incontestably.

Cecil Ormsby lifted her head and looked across the table at her hostess, and the steady gaze of those violet eyes, which were Rosediamond's daughter's best weapons of war, so discomposed Lady Marabout, that she forgot herself sufficiently to proffer Bijou a piece of bread, an unparalleled insult which that canine Sybarite did not forgive all day long.

"Not at home, sir," said Mason, as duly directed, when Cheveley's cab pulled up, a week or two after the general order, at the door.

Cheveley smiled to himself as his grey had her head turned, and the wheel grated off the trottoir, while he lifted his hat to Cecil Ormsby, just visible between the amber curtains and above the balcony flowers of one of the windows of the drawing-room—quite visible enough for her return smile and bow to be seen in the street by Cheveley, in the room by Lady Marabout.

"Some of Lady Tattersall's generalship!" he thought, as the grey trotted out of the square. "Well! I have no business there. Cecil Ormsby is not her Grace of Amandine, nor little Maréchale, and the good lady is quite right to brand me 'dangerous' to her charge, and pronounce me 'inadmissible' to her footmen. I've very little title to resent her verdict."

"My dearest Cecil, whatever possessed you to bow to that man!" cried Lady Marabout, in direst distress.

"Is it not customary to bow to one's acquaintances—I thought it was?" asked Lady Cecil, with demure mischief.

"But, my dear, from a window!—and when Mason is saying we are not at home!"

"That isn't *Mason's* fib, or *Mason's* fault, Lady Marabout!" suggested Cecil, with wicked emphasis.

"There is no falsehood or fault at all anywhere,—everybody knows well enough what 'not at home' means," returned Lady Marabout, almost pettishly.

"Oh yes," laughed the young lady, saucily. "It means 'I am at home and sitting in my drawing-room, but I shall not rise to receive you, because you are not worth the trouble.' It's a polite cut direct, and a honeyed rudeness—a bitter almond wrapped up in a sugar dragée, like a good many other bonbons handed about in society."

"My dear Cecil, you have some very strange ideas; you will get called satirical if you don't take care," said Lady Marabout, nervously.

Cecil Ormsby's tone worried her, and made her feel something as she felt when she had a restive, half-broken pair of horses in her carriage, for the direction of whose next plunge or next kick nobody could answer.

"And if I be—what then?"

"My dear child, you could not anyhow get a more disadvantageous reputation! It may amuse gentlemen, though it frightens half of *them;* but it offends all women irremediably. You see, there are so few whom it doesn't hit somewhere," returned Lady Marabout, quite innocent of the neat satire of her own last sentence.

Cecil Ormsby laughed, and threw herself down by her chaperone's side:

"Never mind: I can bear their enmity; it is a greater compliment than their liking. The women whom women love are always quiet, colourless, inoffensive—foils. Lady Marabout, tell me, why did you give that general order to Mason?"

"I have told you before, my dear. Because I have no wish to know Mr. Chandos Cheveley," returned Lady Marabout, as stiffly as she could say anything. "It is, as I said, not from prejudice, but from prin——"

"Lady Marabout, if you use that word again I will drive to Uncle Ormsby's rooms in the Albany and stay with him for the season; I will, positively! I am sure all the gentlemen there will be delighted to have my society! Pray, what *are* your Ogre's crimes? Did you ever hear anything dishonourable, mean, ungenerous, attributed to him? Did you ever hear he broke his word, or failed to act like a gentleman, or was a defaulter at any settling day?"

Lady Marabout required some explanation of what a defaulter at a settling day might be, and, on receiving it, was compelled to confess that she never *had* heard anything of that kind imputed to Chandos Cheveley:

"Of course I have not, my dear. The man is a gentleman, everybody knows, however idle and improvident a one. If he could be accused of anything of that kind, he would not belong to such clubs, and associate with such men as he does. Besides, Philip would not know him; certainly would not think well of him, which I confess he does. But that is not at all the question."

"*Ne vous en déplaise,* I think it very much and very entirely the question," returned Lady Cecil, with a toss of her haughty little head. "If you can bring nothing in evidence against a man, it is not right to send him to the galleys and mark him 'Forçat.'"

"My dear Cecil, there is plenty in evidence against him," said Lady Marabout, with a mental back glance to certain stories told of the "Amandine set," "though not of that kind. A man may be perfectly unexceptionable in his conduct with his men friends, but very objectionable acquaintance for us to seek, all the same."

"Ah, I see! Lord Goodwood may bet, and flirt, and lounge his days away, and be as fast a man as he likes, and it is all right; but if Mr. Cheveley does the same it is all wrong, because he is not worth forgiving."

"Naturally it is," returned Lady Marabout, seriously and naïvely. "But how very oddly you put things, my love; and why you should interest yourself in this man, when everything I tell you is to his disadvantage, I cannot imagine."

A remark that showed Lady Marabout a skilful tactician, insomuch as it silenced Cecil—a performance rather difficult of accomplishment.

"I am very glad I gave the order to Mason," thought that good lady. "I only wish we did not meet the man in society; but it is impossible to help that. We are all cards of one pack, and get shuffled together, whether we like it or not. I wish Philip would pay her more attention; he admires her, I can see, and he can make any woman like him in ten days when he takes the trouble; but he is so tiresome! She would be exactly suited to him; she has all he would exact—beauty, talent, good blood, and even fortune, though that he would not need. The alliance would be a great happiness to me. Well, he dines here to-night, and he gives that concert at his barracks to-morrow morning, purely to please Cecil, I am sure. I think it may be brought about with careful management."

With which pleasant reflection she went to drive in the Ring, thinking that her maternal and duenna duties would be alike well fulfilled, and her chaperone's career well finished, if by any amount of tact, intrigue, finesses, and diplomacy she could live to see Cecil Ormsby sign herself Cecil Carruthers.

"If that man were only out of town!" she thought, as Cheveley passed them in Amandine's mail-phaeton at the turn.

Lady Marabout might wish Cheveley were out of town—and wish it devoutly she did—but she wasn't very likely to have her desire gratified till the general migration should carry him off in its tide to the deck of a yacht, a lodge in the Highlands, a German Kursaal, or any one of those myriad "good houses" where nobody was so welcome as he, the best shot, the best seat, the best wit, the best billiard player, the best whist player, and the best authority on all fashionable topics, of any man in England. Cheveley used to aver that he liked Lady Marabout, though she detested him; nay, that he liked her *for* her detestation; he said it was cordial, sincere, and refreshing, therefore a treat in the world of Belgravia; still, he didn't like her so well as to leave Town in the middle of May to oblige her; and though he took her hint as it was meant, and pulled up his hansom no more at her door, he met her and Rosediamond's daughter at dinners, balls, concerts, morning-parties innumerable. He saw them in the Ring; he was seen by them at the Opera; he came across them constantly in the gyration of London life. Night after night Lady Cecil persisted in writing his name in her tablets; evening after evening a bizarre fate worried Lady Marabout, by putting him on the left hand of her priceless charge at a dinner-party. Day after day all the harmony of a concert was marred to her ear by seeing her Ogre talking of

Beethoven and Mozart, chamber music and bravura music in Cecil's: morning after morning gall was poured into her luncheon sherry, and wormwood mingled in her vol-au-vent, by being told, with frank mischief, by her desired daughter-in-law, that she "had seen Mr. Cheveley leaning on the rails, smoking," when she had taken her after-breakfast canter.

"Chandos Cheveley getting up before noon! He *must* mean something unusual!" thought her chaperone.

"Helena has set her heart on securing Cecil Ormsby for Carruthers. I hope she may succeed better than she did with poor Goodwood last season," laughed Lady Hautton, with her inimitable sneer, glancing at the young lady in question at a bazaar in Willis's Rooms, selling rosebuds for anything she liked to ask for them, and cigars tied up with blue ribbon a guinea the half-dozen, at the Marabout stall. Lady Hautton had just been paying a charitable visit to St. Cecilia's Refuge, of which she was head patroness, where, having floated in with much benignity, been worshipped by a select little toady troop, administered spiritual consolation with admirable condescension, and distributed illuminated texts for the adornment of the walls and refreshment of the souls, she was naturally in a Christian frame of mind towards her neighbours. Lady Marabout caught the remark—as she was intended to do—and thought it not quite a pleasant one; but, my good sir, did you ever know those estimable people, who spend all their time fitting themselves for another world, ever take the trouble to make themselves decently agreeable in the present one? The little pleasant courtesies, affabilities, generosities, and kindnesses, that rub the edge off the flint-stones of the Via Dolorosa, are quite beneath the attention of Mary the Saint, and only get attended to by Martha the Worldly, poor butterfly thing! who is fit for nothing more serviceable and profitable!

Lady Marabout *had* set her heart on Cecil Ormsby's filling that post of honour—of which no living woman was deserving in her opinion—that of "Philip's wife;" an individual who had been, for so many years, a fond ideal, a haunting anxiety, and a dreaded rival, en même temps, to her imagination. She *was* a little bit of a match-maker: she had, over and over again, arranged the most admirable and suitable alliances; alliances that would have shamed the scepticism of the world in general, as to the desirability of the holy bonds, and brought every refractory man to the steps of St. George's; alliances that would have come off with the greatest éclat, but for one trifling hindrance and difficulty—namely, the people most necessary to the arrangements could never by any chance be brought to view them in the same light, and were certain to give her diplomacy the *croc-en-jambe* at the very moment of its culminating glory and finishing finesses. She was a little bit of a matchmaker—most kind-hearted women are; the tinder they play with is much better left alone, but *they* don't remember that! Like children in a forest they think they'll light a pretty bright fire, just for fun, and never remember what a seared, dreary waste that fire may make, or what a prairie conflagration it may stretch into before it's stopped.

"Cecil Ormsby is a terrible flirt," said Lady Hautton to another lady, glancing at the rapid sale of the rosebuds and cigars, the bunches of violets and the sprays of lilies of the valley, in which that brilliant beauty was doing such thriving business at such extravagant profits, while the five Ladies Hautton presided solemnly over articles of gorgeous splendour, which threatened to be left on hand, and go in a tombola, as ignominiously as a beauty after half a dozen seasons, left unwooed and unwon, goes to the pêle-mêle raffle of German Bad society, and is sold off at the finish to an unknown of the Line, or a Civil Service fellow, with five hundred a year.

"Was Cecil a flirt?" wondered Lady Marabout. Lady Marabout was fain to confess to herself that she thought she was—nay, that she hoped she was. If it wasn't flirting, that way in which she smiled on Chandos Cheveley, sold him cigarettes, laughed with him over the ices and nectarines he fetched her, and positively invested him with the cordon d'honneur of a little bouquet of Fairy roses for which twenty men sued, and he (give Satan his due) did not even ask—if it wasn't flirting, *what was it?* Lady Marabout shivered at the suggestion; and though she was, on principle, excessively severe on flirting, she could be very glad of what she didn't approve, when it aided her, on occasion—like most other people—and would so far have agreed with Talleyrand, as to welcome the worst crime (of coquetry) as far less a sin than the unpardonable blunder of encouraging an Ogre!

"I can't send Cecil away from the stall, as if she were a naughty child, and I can't order the man out of Willis's Rooms," thought that unhappy and fatally-worried lady, as she presided behind her stall, an emphatic witness of the truth of the poeticism that "grief smiles and gives no sign," insomuch as she looked the fairest, sunniest, best-looking, and best tempered Dowager that ever shrouded herself in Chantilly lace.

"I do think those ineligible, detrimental, objectionable persons ought not to be let loose on society as they are," she pondered; "let them have their clubs and their mess breakfasts, their Ascot and their Newmarket, their lasquenet parties and their handicap pigeon matches, if they like; but to have them come amongst *us* as they do, asked everywhere if they happen to have good blood and good style, free to waltz and flirt and sing, and show all sorts of attention to marriageable girls, while all the while they are no more available for anything serious than if they were club stewards or cabmen—creatures that live on their fashionable aroma, and can't afford to buy the very bottles of bouquets on their toilette-tables—fast men, too, who, knowing they can never marry themselves, make a practice of turning marriage into ridicule, and help to set all the rich men more dead against it than they are—to have them come promiscuously among the very best people, with nothing to distinguish them as dangerous, or label them as 'ought to be avoided,'—it's dreadful! it's a social evil! it *ought* to be remedied! They muzzle dogs in June, why can't they label Ogres in the season? I mustn't send poor little Bijou out for a walk in Kensington Gardens without a string, these men ought not to go about in society without restriction: a snap of Bijou's doesn't do half such mischief as a smile of theirs!"

And Lady Marabout chatted across the stall to his Grace of Doncaster, and entrapped him into purchases of fitting ducal prodigality, and smiled on scores of people she didn't know, in pleasant *pro tempore* expediency that had, like most expediency in our day, its ultimate goal in their purses and pockets, and longed for some select gendarmerie to clear Willis's Rooms of her Cobra Capella, and kept an eye all the while on Cecil Ormsby—Cecil, selling off everything on the stall by sheer force of her bright violet eyes, receiving ten-pound notes for guinea trifles, making her Bourse rise as high as she liked, courted for a spray of mignonette as entreatingly as ever Law was courted in the Rue Quincampoix for Mississippi scrip, served by a Corps d'Elite, in whom she had actually enlisted Carruthers, Goodwood, Fulke Nugent, Fitzbreguet, and plenty of the most desirable and most desired men in town, yet of which—oh the obstinacy of women !—she had actually made Chandos Cheveley, with those wicked little Fairy roses in his coat, positively the captain and the chief!

"It is enough to break one's heart;" thought Lady Marabout, wincing under the Hautton glance, which she saw only the plainer because she *wouldn't* see it at all, and which said with horrible distinctness, "There is that man, who can hardly keep his own cab, who floats on society like a pleasure boat, without rudder, ballast, or anchors, of whom I have told you, in virtuous indignation and Christian charity, fifty thousand naughty stories, who visits that wicked notorious little Maréchale, who belongs to the Amandine set, who is everything that he ought not and nothing that he ought to be, who hasn't a penny he doesn't make by a well-made betting-book or a dashed off magazine article,—there he is flirting all day at your own stall with Rosediamond's daughter, and you haven't the *savoir faire*, the strength of will, the tact, the proper feeling, to stop it!"

To all of which charges Lady Marabout humbly bent her head, metaphorically speaking, and writhed, in secret, under the glance of her ancient enemy, while she talked and laughed with the Duke of Doncaster. C. Petronius, talking epicureanisms and witticisms, while the life-blood was ebbing away at every breath, was nothing to the suffering and the fortitude of Helena, Lady Marabout, turning a smiling, sunny, tranquil countenance to the world in front of her stall, while that world could see Chandos Cheveley admitted behind it!

"I must do something to stop this!" thought Lady Marabout, with the desperation of a Charlotte Corday.

"Is Cheveley going in for the Ormsby tin?" said Amandine to Eyre Lee. "Best thing he could do, eh? But Lady Tattersall and the trustees would cut up rough, I am afraid."

"What does Chandos mean with that daughter of Rosediamond's?" wondered her Grace, annoyedly. She had had him some time in her own rose chains, and when ladies have driven a lover long in that sort of harness, they could double-thong him with all the might of their little hands, if they fancy he is trying to break away.

"Is Chandos Cheveley turning fortune-hunter? I suppose he would like Lady Cecil's money to pay off his Ascot losses," said Mrs. Maréchale, with a malign laugh. At Ascot, the day before, he had not gone near her carriage; the year before he had driven her down in her mail-phaeton: what would there be too black to say of him *now*?

"I must do something to stop this!" determined Lady Marabout, driving homewards, and glancing at Cecil Ormsby, as that young lady lay back in the carriage, a little grave and dreamy after her day's campaign—signs of the times terrifically ominous to her chaperone, skilled in reading such meteorological omens. But how was the drag to be put on the wheel? That momentous question absorbed Lady Marabout through her toilette that evening, pursued her to dinner, haunted her through two soirées, kept her wide awake all night, woke up with her to her early coffee, and flavoured the potted tongue and the volaille à la Richelieu she took for her breakfast. "I can't turn the man out of town, and I can't tell people to strike him off their visiting-lists, and I can't shut Cecil and myself up in this house as if it were a convent; and, as to speaking to her, it is not the slightest use. She has such a way of putting things that one can never deny their truth, or reason them away, as one can with other girls. Fond as I am of her, she's fearfully difficult to manage. Still I owe it as a sacred duty to poor Rosediamond and the General, who says he places such implicit confidence in me, to interfere. It is my duty; it can't be helped. I must speak to Chandos Cheveley himself. I have no right to consult my own scruples when so much is at stake," valorously determined Lady Marabout, resolved to follow stern moral rules, and, when right was right, to let "le diable prendre le fruit."

To be a perfect woman of the world, I take it, ladies must weed out early in life all such little contemptible weaknesses as a dislike to wounding other people; and a perfect woman of the world, therefore, Lady Marabout was not, and never would be. Nohow could she acquire Anne Hautton's invaluable sneer—nohow could she imitate that estimable pietist's delightful way of dropping little icy-barbed sentences, under which I have known the bravest to shrink, frozen, out of her path. Lady Marabout was grieved if she broke the head off a flower needlessly, and she could not cure herself of the same lingering folly in disliking to say a thing that pained anybody; it is incidental to the De Boncœur blood—Carruthers inherits it—and I have seen fellows spared through it, whom he could else have withered into the depths of their boots by one of his satirical mots. So she did not go to her task of speaking to Chandos Cheveley, armed at all points for the encounter, and taking pleasure in feeling the edge of her rapier, as Lady Hautton would have done. The Cobra was dangerous, and must be crushed, but Lady Marabout did not very much relish setting her heel on it; it was a glittering terrible, much-to-be-feared, and much-to-be-abused serpent,—but it might *feel* all the same, you see.

"I dislike the man on principle, but I don't want to pain him," she thought, sighing for the Hautton stern *savoir faire* and Achilles impenetrability, and goading herself on with the remembrance of duty and General Ormsby, when the opportunity she had resolved to seek presented itself accidentally at a breakfast of Lady George Frangipane's toy villa at Fulham, and she found herself comparatively alone in the rose-garden with Cheveley, for once without Cecil's terrible violet eyes upon her.

"Will you allow me a few words with you, Mr. Cheveley?" she asked, in her blandest manner—the kindly hypocrite!

The blow must be dealt, but it might as well be softened with a few chloroform fumes, and not struck savagely with an iron-spiked mace.

Cheveley raised his eyes.

"With me? With the greatest pleasure!"

"He is a mere fortune-hunter. I will *not* spare him, I am resolved," determined Lady Marabout, as she toyed with her parasol handle, remarked incidentally how unequalled Lady George was in roses, especially in the tea-rose, and dealt blow number one. "Mr. Cheveley, I am going to speak to you very frankly. I consider frankness in all things best, myself——"

Cheveley bowed, and smiled slightly.

"I wish he would answer, it would make it so much easier; he will only look at one with those eyes of his, and certainly they *are* splendid!" thought Lady Marabout, as she went on quickly, on the same principle as the Chasseurs Indiens approach an abattis at double quick. "When Lord Rosediamond died last year he left, as probably you are aware, his daughter in my sole care; it was a great responsibility—very great—and I feel, of course, that I shall have to answer to him for my discharge of it."

Lady Marabout didn't say whether Rosediamond was accustomed to visit her per medium, and hear her account of her stewardship nightly through a table-claw; but we must suppose that he was. Cheveley bowed again, and didn't inquire, not being spiritually interested.

"Why *won't* he answer?" thought Lady Marabout. "That I have not been blind to your very marked attention to my dear Cecil, I think you must be aware, Mr. Cheveley, and it is on that subject, indeed, that I——"

"Wished to speak to me? I understand!" said Cheveley, as she paused, with that faint smile, half sad, half proud, that perplexed Lady Marabout. "You are about to insinuate to me gently that those attentions have been exceedingly distasteful to you, exceedingly unacceptable in me; you would remind me that Lady Cecil Ormsby is a beauty and an heiress, and that I am a fortune-hunter, whose designs are seen through and motives found out; you would hint to me that our intercourse must cease: is it not so?"

Lady Marabout, cursed with that obstinate, ill-bred, unextinguishable weakness for truth incidental and ever fatal to the De Boncœurs, couldn't say that it was *not* what she was going to observe to him, but it was exceedingly unpleasant, now it was put in such plain, uncomplimentary terms, to admit to the man's face that she was about to tell him he was a mercenary schemer, whose attentions only sprang from a lawless passion for the *beaux yeux* of Cecil's *cassette*.

She would have told him all that, and much more, with greatest dignity and effect, if he hadn't anticipated her; but to have her weapon parried before it was fairly out of its sheath unnerved her arm at the outset.

"What *would* Anne Hautton do? Dear me! there never was anybody perpetually placed in such wretched positions as I am!" thought Lady Marabout, as she played with her parasol, and murmured something not very clear relative to "responsibility" and "not desirable," two words as infallibly a part of Lady Marabout's stock-in-trade as a sneer at the "swells" is of *Punch's.* How she sighed for some cold, nonchalant, bitter sentence, such as the Hautton répertoire could have supplied! How she scorned herself for her own weakness and lack of severity! But she would not have relished hurting a burglar's feelings, though she had seen him in the very act of stealing her jewel-boxes, by taxing him with the theft; and though the Ogre *must* be crushed, the crushing began to give Lady Marabout neuralgic twinges. She was no more able to say the stern things she had rehearsed and resolved upon, than she was able to stab him with her parasol, or strangle him with her handkerchief.

"I guessed rightly what you were about to say to me!" said Cheveley, who seemed somehow or other to have taken all the talk into his own hands, and to have become the master of the position. "I thought so. I do not wonder at your construction; I cannot blame you for your resolution. Lady Cecil has some considerable fortune, they say; it is very natural that you should have imagined a man like myself, with no wealth save a good name, which only serves to make lack of wealth more conspicuous, incapable of seeking her society for any better, higher, more disinterested motive than that of her money; it was not charitable, perhaps, to decide unhesitatingly that it was impossible I could be drawn to her by any other attraction, that it was imperative I must be dead to everything in her that gives her a nobler and a higher charm; but it was very natural, and one learns never to hope for the miracle of a charitable judgment, *even* from Lady Marabout!"

"My dear Mr. Cheveley, indeed you mistake!" began Lady Marabout, restlessly. That was a little bit of a story, he didn't mistake at all; but Lady Marabout, collapsing like an india-rubber ball under the prick of a sarcasm, shivered all over at his words, his voice, his slight, sad smile. "The man is as dreadful as Cecil," she thought; "he puts things so horribly clearly!"

"Mistake? I do not think I do. You have thought all this, and very naturally; but now hear me for a moment. I have sought Lady Cecil's society, that is perfectly true; we have been thrown together in society, very often accidentally; sometimes, I admit, through my own seeking. Few men could be with her and be steeled against her. I have been with her too much; but I sought her at first carelessly, then irresistibly and unconsciously, never with the motive you attribute to me.

I am not as utterly beggared as you deem me, but neither am I entirely barren of honour. Believe me, Lady Marabout, my pride alone would be amply sufficient to raise a barrier between me and Cecil stronger than any that could be opposed to me by others. Yesterday I casually overheard words from Amandine which showed me that Society, like you, has put but one construction on the attention I have paid her—a construction I might have foreseen had I not been unconsciously fascinated, and forgetful for the time of the infallible whispers of my kind friends. Her fortune, I know, was never numbered among her attractions for me; so little, that now that Amandine's careless words have reminded me of the verdict of Society, I shall neither seek her nor see her again. Scores of men marry women for their money, and their money alone, but I am not one of them; with my own precarious fortunes, only escaping ruin because I am not rich enough to tempt ruin, I would never take advantage of any interest I may have excited in her, to speak to her of a passion that the world would tell her was only another name for avarice and selfishness. I dare not trust myself with her longer, perhaps. I am no god to answer for my self-control; but you need not fear; I will never seek her love—never even tell her of mine. I shall leave town to-morrow; what *I* may suffer matters not. Lady Cecil is safe from me! Whatever you may have heard of my faults, follies, or vices, none ever told you, I think, that I broke my word?"

"And when the man said that, my dear Philip, I assure you I felt as guilty as if I had done him some horrible wrong; he stood there with his head up, looking at me with his sad proud eyes—and they are beautiful!—till, positively, I could almost have cried—I could, indeed, for though I don't like him on principle, I couldn't help pitying him," said Lady Marabout, in a subsequent relation of the scene to her son. "Wasn't it a terrible position? I was as near as possible forgetting everything due to poor Rosediamond, and saying to him that I believed Cecil liked him and would never like anybody else, but, thank Heaven! I remembered myself, and checked myself in time. If it had been anybody but Chandos Cheveley, I should really have admired him, he spoke so nobly! When he lifted his hat and left me, though I *ought* to have been glad (and I *was* glad, of course) that Cecil would be free from the society of anybody so objectionable and so dangerous, I felt wretched for him—I did indeed. It *is* so hard always to be placed in such miserable positions!"

By which you will perceive that the triumphant crushing of Lady Marabout's Cobra didn't afford her the unmixed gratification she had anticipated.

"I have done what was my duty to poor Rosediamond, and what General Ormsby's confidence merited," she solaced herself that day, feeling uncomfortably and causelessly guilty, she hardly knew why, when she saw Chandos Cheveley keeping sedulously with the "Amandine set," and read in Cecil's tell-tale face wonder, perplexity, and regret thereat, till the Frangipane fête came to an end. She had appeased the manes of the late Rosediamond, who, to her imagination, always appeared sitting up aloft, keeping watch over the discharge of her chaperone's duties, but she had a secret and a horrible dread that she had excited the wrath of Rosediamond's daughter. She had driven her Ogre off the scene, it is true, but she could not feel that she had altogether come off the best in the contest. Anne Hautton had congratulated her, indeed, on having "acted with decision *at last*," but then she had marred it all by asking if Carruthers was likely to be engaged to Cecil? And Lady Marabout had been forced to confess he was not; Philip, when pressed by her that very morning to be a little attentive to Cecil, having shaken his head and laughed:

"She's a bewitching creature, mother, but she don't bewitch *me!* You know what Shakspeare says of wooing, wedding, and repentance. I've no fancy for the inseparable trio!"

Altogether, Lady Marabout was far from peace and tranquillity, though the Cobra *was* crushed, as she drove away from the Frangipane breakfast, and she was little nearer them when Cecil turned her eyes upon her with a question worse to Lady Marabout's ear than the roar of a Lancaster battery:

"What have you said to him?"

"My dear Cecil! What have I said to whom?" returned Lady Marabout, with Machiavelian surprise.

"You know well enough, Lady Marabout! What have you said to him—to Mr. Cheveley?"

Cecil's impetuosity invariably knocked Lady Marabout down at one blow, as a ball knocks down the pegs at lawn billiards. She rallied after the shock, but not successfully, and tried at coldness and decision, as recommended by Hautton prescriptions.

"My dear Cecil, I have said to him what I think it my duty to say to him. Responsible as I am for you——"

"Responsible for me, Lady Marabout? Indeed you are not. I am responsible for myself!" interrupted Lady Cecil, with that haughty arch of her eyebrows and that flush on her face before which Lady Marabout was powerless. "What have you said to him? I *will* know!"

"I said very little to him, indeed, my dear; he said it all himself."

"What did he say himself?"

"I *must* tell her—she is so dreadfully persistent," thought the unhappy and badgered Peeress; and tell her she did, being a means of lessening the young lady's interest in the subject of discussion as little judicious as she could well have hit upon.

Lady Cecil listened, silent for once, shading her face with her parasol, shading the tears that gathered on her lashes and rolled down her delicate flushed cheeks, at the recital of Chandos Cheveley's words, from her chaperone's sight.

Lady Marabout gathered courage from the tranquillity with which her recital was heard.

"You see, my love, Chandos Cheveley's own honour points in the same direction with my judgment," she wound up, in conclusion. "He has acted rightly at last, I allow, and if you—if you have for the moment felt a tinge of warmer interest in him—if you have been taken by the fascination of his manner, and invested him with a young girl's romance, you will soon see with us how infinitely better it is that you should part, and how impossible it is that——"

Lady Cecil's eyes flashed such fire through their tears, that Lady Marabout stopped, collapsed and paralysed.

"It is by such advice as that you repay his nobility, his generosity, his honour!—it is by such words as those you reward him for acting as not one man in a hundred would have acted! Hush, hush, Lady Marabout, I thought better of you!"

"Good Heavens! *where will it end?*" thought Lady Marabout, distractedly, as Rosediamond's wayward daughter sprang down at the door with a flush in her face, and a contemptuous anger in her eyes, that made Bijou, jumping on her, stop, stare, and whine in canine dismay.

"And I fancied she was listening passively!" thought Lady Marabout.

"Well! the man is gone to-day, that is one comfort. I am very thankful I acted as I did," reasoned that ever-worried lady in her boudoir the next morning. "I am afraid Cecil is really very fond of him, there were such black shadows under her eyes at breakfast, poor child! But it is much better as it is—much better. I should never have held up my head again if I had allowed her to make such a disadvantageous alliance. I can hardly bear to think of what would have been said, even now the danger is over!"

While Lady Marabout was thus comforting herself over her embroidery silks, Cecil Ormsby was pacing into the Park, with old Twitters the groom, ten yards behind her, taking her early ride before the world was up—it was only eleven o'clock; Cecil had been used to early rising and would never leave it off, having discovered some recipe that made her independent of ordinary mortals' quantum of sleep.

"Surely he will be here this morning to see me for the last time," thought that young lady, as she paced up the New Ride under the Kensington Gardens' trees, with her heart beating quickly under the gold aiglettes of her riding-jacket.

"I must see her once more, and then——" thought Chandos Cheveley, as he leaned against the rails, smoking, as he had done scores of mornings before. His man had packed his things; his hansom was waiting at the gates to take him to the station, and his portmanteau was lettered "Ischl." He had only come to take one last look of the face that haunted him as no other had ever succeeded in doing. The ring of a horse's hoof fell on his ear. There she came, on her roan hack, with the sun glancing off her chestnut hair. He looked up to bow to her as she passed on, for the ride had never been a rendezvous for more than a bow (Cecil's insurrectionary tactics had always been carried on before Lady Marabout's face,) but the roan was pulled up by him that morning for the very first time, and Cecil's eyes fell on him through their lashes.

"Mr. Cheveley—is it true you are going out of town?"

"Quite true."

If her voice quivered as she asked the question, he barely kept his own from doing the same as he answered it.

"Will you be gone long?"

"Till next season, at earliest."

His promise to Lady Marabout was hard to keep! He would not have trusted his strength if he had known she would have done more than canter on with her usual bow and smile.

Cecil was silent. The groom waited like a statue his ten yards behind them. She played with her reins nervously, the colour coming and going painfully in her face.

"Lady Marabout told me of—of some conversation you had with her yesterday?"

Low as the words were, Cheveley heard them, and his hand, as it lay on the rails, shook like a girl's.

Cecil was silent again; she looked at him, her eyes full of unshed tears, as the colour burned in her face, and she drooped her head almost to a level with her hands as they played with the reins.

"She told me—you——"

She stopped again. Cecil was new to making proposals, though not to rejecting them. Cheveley set his teeth to keep in the words that rushed to his lips, and Cecil saw the struggle as she bent her head lower and lower to the saddle, and twisted the reins into a Gordian knot.

"Do you—must we—why should——"

Fragmentary monosyllables enough, but sufficient to fell his strength.

"For God's sake do not tempt me!" he muttered. "You little know!"

"I know all!" she whispered softly.

"You cannot! My worthless life!—my honour! I could not take such a sacrifice, I would not!——"

"But if my peace——"

She could not end her phrase, yet it said enough;—his hand closed on hers.

"Your peace! Good God! in *my* hands! I stay then—let the world say what it likes!"

"Drive back; I have changed my mind about going abroad to-day," said Cheveley, as he got into his hansom at Albert-gate.

"How soon she has got over it! Girls do," thought Lady

Marabout, as Cecil Ormsby came in from her ride with the brightest bloom on her cheeks a June breeze ever fanned there. She laid her hat on the table, flung her gauntlets at Bijou, and threw herself on her knees by Lady Marabout, a saucy smile on her face, though her lashes were wet.

"Dear Lady Marabout, I can forgive you now, but you will never forgive me!"

Lady Marabout turned white as her point-lace cap, gave a little gasp of paralysed terror, and pushed back her chair as though a shell had exploded on the hearth-rug.

"Cecil! Good Heaven!—you don't mean——"

"Yes I do," said Cecil, with a fresh access of colour, and a low, soft laugh.

Lady Marabout gasped again for breath.

"General Ormsby!" was all she could ejaculate.

"General Ormsby? What of him? Did you ever know Uncle Johnnie refuse to please *me?* And if my money be to interfere with my happiness, and not promote it, as I conceive *it's my* duty and purpose to do, why, I am of age in July, you know, and I shall make a deed of gift of it all to the Soldiers' Home or the Wellington College, and there is only one person who will care for me *then.*"

Lady Cecil was quite capable of carrying her threat into execution, and Lady Cecil had her own way accordingly, as she had had it from her babyhood.

"I shall never hold up my head again! And what a horrible triumph for Anne Hautton! I am always the victim—always!" said Lady Marabout, that day two months, when the last guest at Cecil Ormsby's wedding déjeûner had rolled away from the house. "A girl who might have married anybody, Philip; she refused twenty offers this season—she did, indeed! It is heart-breaking, say what you like; you needn't laugh, it *is.* Why did I offer them Fernditton for this month, you say, if I didn't countenance the alliance? Nonsense! that is nothing to the purpose. Of course, I seemed to countenance it to a degree, for Cecil's sake, and I admire Chandos Cheveley, I confess (at least I should do, if I didn't dislike his class on principle); but, say what you like, Philip, it is the most terrible thing that could have happened for *me.* Those men *ought* to be labelled, or muzzled, or done something with, and not be let loose on society as they are. He has a noble nature, you say. I don't say anything against his nature! She worships him? Well, I know she does. What is that to the point? He will make her happy? I am sure he will. He has the gentlest way with her possible. But how does that console *me?* Think what *you* feel when an outsider, as you call it, beats all the favourites, upsets all your betting-books, and carries off the Doncaster Cup, and then realise, if you've any humanity in you, what *we* feel under such a trial as this is to me! Only to think what Anne Hautton will always say!"

Lady Marabout is not the only person to whom the first thought, the most dreaded ghost, the ghastliest skeleton, the direst aggravation, the sharpest dagger-thrust, under all troubles, is the remembrance of that one omnipotent ogre—"QU'EN DIRA-T-ON?"

"Laugh at her mother," counselled Carruthers; and *amis lecteurs,* I pass on his advice to you as the best and sole bowstring for strangling the ogre in question, which is the grimmest we have in all Bogeydom.

LADY MARABOUT'S TROUBLES;

OR,

THE WORRIES OF A CHAPERONE.

IN THREE SEASONS.

SEASON THE THIRD.—THE CLIMAX.

"MY dear Philip, the most unfortunate thing has happened," said Lady Marabout, one morning; "really the greatest contretemps that could have occurred. I suppose I never *am* to be quiet!"

"What's the row *now*, madre carissima?" asked her son.

"It is no row, but it is an annoyance. You have heard me speak of my poor dear friend Mrs. Montolieu; you know she married unhappily, poor thing, to a dreadful creature, something in a West India Regiment—nobody at all. It is very odd and it is very wrong, and there must be a great mistake somewhere, but certainly most marriages *are* unhappy."

"And yet you are always recommending the institution!

"What an extraordinary obstinacy and opticism, my dear mother! I suppose you do it on the same principle as nurses recommend children nasty medicines, or as old Levett used to tender me dry biscuit *sans confiture*: ''Tisn't so nice as marmalade, I know, Master Philip, but then, dear, it's *so* wholesome?'"

"Hold your tongue, Philip," cried Lady Marabout; "I don't mean it in that sense at all, and you know I don't. If poor Lilla Motolieu is unhappy, I am sure it is all her abominable odious husband's fault; she is the sweetest creature possible. But she has a daughter, and concerning that daughter she wrote to me about a month ago, and—I never was more vexed in my life—she wants me to bring her out this season."

"A victim again! My poor dear mother, you certainly deserve a Belgravian testimonial; you shall have a statue set up in Lowndes-square commemorative of the heroic endurance of a chaperone's existence, subscribed for gratefully by the girls you married well, and penitentially by the girls you couldn't marry at all."

Lady Marabout laughed a little, but sighed again:

"'It is fun to you, but it is death to me'——"

"As the women say when we flirt with them," interpolated Carruthers.

"You see, poor dear Lilla didn't know what to do. There she is, in that miserable island with the unpronounceable name that the man is governor of; shut out of all society, with nobody to marry this girl to if she had her there, except their secretary, or a West Indian planter. Of course, no mother would ruin her daughter's prospects, and take her into such an out-of-the-world corner. She knew no one so well as myself, and so to me she applied. She is the sweetest creature! I would do anything to oblige or please her, but I can't help being very sorry she has pounced upon me. And I don't the least know what this girl is like, not even whether she is presentable. I dare say she was petted and spoiled in that lazy, luxurious, tropical life when she was little, and she has been brought up the last few years in a convent in France, the very last education *I* should choose for a girl. Fancy, if I should find her an ignorant, unformed hoyden, or a lethargic, overgrown child, or an artificial French girl, who goes to confession every day, and carries on twenty undiscoverable love affairs—fancy, if she should be ugly, or awkward, or brusque, or gauche, as ten to one she will be—fancy, if I find her utterly unpresentable!—what in the world shall I do!"

"Decline her," suggested Carruthers. "I wouldn't have a horse put in my tilbury that I'd never seen, and risk driving a spavined, wall-eyed, under-bred brute through the Park; and I suppose the ignominy of the début would be to you much what the ignominy of such a turn-out would be to me."

"Decline her? I can't, my dear Philip! I agreed to have her a month ago. I have never seen you to tell you till now, you know; you've been so sworn to Newmarket all through the Spring Meetings. Decline her? she comes to-night!"

"Comes to-night?" laughed Carruthers. "All is lost then. We shall see the Countess of Marabout moving through London society with a West Indian, who has a skin like Othello; has as much idea of manners as a housemaid that suddenly turns out an heiress, and is invited by people to whom she yesterday carried up their hot water; reflects indelible disgrace on her chaperone by gaucheries unparalleled; throws glass or silver missiles at Soames's head when he doesn't wait upon her at luncheon to her liking, as she has been accustomed to do at the negroes——"

"Philip, pray don't!" cried Lady Marabout, piteously.

"Or, we shall welcome under the Marabout wing a young lady fresh from convent walls and pensionnaire flirtations, who astonishes a dinner-party by only taking the first course, on the score of jours maigres and conscientious scruples; who is visited by révérends pères from Farm-street, and fills your drawing-room with High Church curates, whom she tries to draw over from their 'mother's' to their 'sister's' open arms; who goes every day to early morning mass instead of taking an early morning canter, and who, when invited to sing at a soirée musicale, begins 'Sancta Maria adorata!'"

"Philip, *don't!*" cried Lady Marabout. "Bark at him, Bijou, the heartless man! It is as likely as not little Montolieu may realise one of your horrible sketches. Ah, Philip, you don't know what the worries of a chaperone are!"

"Thank Heaven, no!" laughed Carruthers.

"It is easy to make a joke of it, and very tempting, I dare say—one's woes always *are* amusing to other people, they don't feel the smart themselves, and only laugh at the grimace it forces from one—but I can tell you, Philip, it is anything but a pleasant prospect to have to go about in society with a girl one may be ashamed of!—I don't know anything more trying; I would as soon wear paste diamonds as introduce a girl that is not perfectly good style."

"But why not have thought of all this in time?"

Lady Marabout sank back in her chair, and curled Bijou's ears with a sigh.

"My dear Philip, if everybody always thought of things in time, would there be any follies committed at all? It's precisely because repentance comes too late, that repentance is such a horrible wasp, with such a merciless sting. Besides, *could* I refuse poor Lilla Montolieu, unhappy as she is with that bear of a man?"

"I never felt more anxious in my life," thought Lady Marabout, as she sat before the fire in her drawing-room—it was a chilly April day—stirring the cream into her preprandial cup of tea, resting one of her small satin-slippered feet on Bijou's back, while the firelight sparkled on the Dresden figures, the statuettes, the fifty thousand costly trifles, in which the Marabout rooms equalled any in Belgravia. "I never felt more anxious—not on any of Philip's dreadful yachting expeditions, nor even when he went that perilous exploring tour into Arabia Deserta, I do think. If she *should* be unpresentable—and then poor dear Lilla's was not much of a match, and the girl will not have a sou, she tells me frankly; I can hardly hope to do anything for her. There is one thing, she will not be a responsibility like Valencia or Cecil, and what would have been a bad match for *them* will be a good one for her. She must accept the first offer made her, if she have any at all, which will be very doubtful; few Benedicts bow to Beatrices now-a-days, unless Beatrice is a good 'investment,' as they call it. She will soon be here. That is the carriage now stopped, I do think. How anxious I feel! Really it can't be worse for a Turkish bridegroom never to see his wife's face till after the ceremony than it is for one not to have seen a girl till one has to introduce her. If she shouldn't be good style!"

And Lady Marabout's heart palpitated, possibly prophetically, as she set down her little Sèvres cup and rose out of her arm-chair, with Bijou shaking his silver collar and bells, to welcome the new inmate of Lowndes-square, with her sunny smile and her kindly voice, and her soft beaming eyes, which, as I have often stated, would have made Lady Marabout look amiable at an Abruzzi bandit who had demanded her purse, or an executioner who had led her out to capital punishment, and now made her radiate, warm and bright, on a guest whose advent she dreaded. Hypocrisy you say. Not a bit of it! Hypocrisy may be eminently courteous, but, take my word for it, it's never *cordial!* There are natures who throw such golden rays around them naturally, as there are others who think brusquerie and acidity cardinal virtues, and deal them out as points of conscience; are there not sunbeams that shine kindly alike on fragrant violet tufts and barren brambles, velvet lawns and muddy trottoirs? are there not hail-clouds that send jagged points of ice on all the world pêle-mêle, as mercilessly on the broken rose as on the granite boulder?

"She *is* good style, thank Heaven!" thought Lady Marabout, as she went forward, with her white soft hands, their jewels flashing in the light, outstretched in welcome. "My dear child, how much you are like your mother! You must let me be fond of you for her sake, first, and then—for your own!"

The conventional thought did not make the cordial utterance insincere. The two ran in couples—we often drive such pairs, every one of us—and if *they* entail insincerity, *Veritas, vale!*

"Madre mia, I called to inquire if you have survived the anxiety of last night, and to know what *jeune sauvage* or fair *religieuse* you may have had sent you for the galvanising of Belgravia?" said Carruthers, paying his accustomed visit in his mother's boudoir, and throwing macaroons at Bijou's nose.

"My dear Philip, I hardly know; she puzzles me. She's what, if she were a man, I should classify as a detrimental."

"Is she awkward?"

"Not in the least. Perfect manners, wherever she learned them."

"Brusque?"

"Soft as a gazelle. Very like her mother."

"Brown?"

"Fair as that statuette, with a beautiful bloom; lovely gold hair, too, and hazel eyes."

"What are the short-comings, then?"

"There are none; and it's that that puzzles me. She's been six years in that convent, and yet, I do assure you, her style is perfect. She's hardly eighteen, but she's the air of the best society. She is—a—well, *almost* nobody, as people rank now, you know, for poor dear Lilla's marriage was not what she should have made, but the girl might be a royal duke's daughter for manner."

"A premature artificial *femme du monde?* Bah! nothing more odious," said Carruthers, poising a macaroon on Pandore's nose. "Make ready!—present!—fire! There's a good dog!"

"No, nothing of that sort: very natural, frank, vivacious. Nothing artificial about her; very charming indeed! But she might be a young Countess, the queen of a *monde*, rather than a young girl just out of a French convent; and, you know, my dear Philip, that sort of wit and nonchalance may be admirable for Cecil Cheveley, assured of her position, but they're dangerous to a girl like this Flora Montolieu: they will make people remark her and ask who she is, and try to pull her to pieces, if they don't find her somebody they *dare* not hit. I would much rather she were of the general ordinary pattern, pleasing, but nothing remarkable, well-bred, but nothing to envy, thoroughly educated, but monosyllabic in society; such a girl as that passes among all the rest, suits mediocre men (and the majority of men *are* mediocre, you know, my dear Philip), and pleases women because she is a nice girl, and no rival; but this little Montolieu——"

And Lady Marabout sighed with a prescience of coming troubles, while Carruthers laughed and rose.

"Will worry your life out! I must go, for I have to sit in court-martial at two (for a mere trifle), a deuced bore to us, but *le service oblige!*), so I shall escape introduction to your little Montolieu to-day. Why *will* you fill your house with girls, my dear mother?—it is fifty times more agreeable when you are reigning alone. Henceforth, I can't come in to lunch with you without going through the formula of a mild flirtation—women think you so ill-natured if you don't flirt a little with them, that amiable men like myself haven't strength of mind to refuse. You should keep *your* house an open sanctuary for me, when you know I've no other in London except when I retreat into White's and the U.S.!"

"She puzzles me!" pondered Lady Marabout, as Despréaux disrobed her that night. "I always *am* to be puzzled, I think! I never *can* have one of those quiet, mediocre, well-mannered, remarkable-for-nothing girls, who have no idiosyncrasies and give nobody any trouble; one marries them safely to some second-rate man; nobody admires them, and nobody dislikes them; they're to society what neutral tint is among body-colours, or rather what greys are among dresses, inoffensive, unimpeachable, always look ladylike, but never look brilliant; colourless dresses are very useful, and so are characterless girls; and I dare say the draper would tell us the greys in the long run are the easiest to sell as the girls are to marry; they please the commonplace taste of the generality, and do for every-day wear! Flora Montolieu puzzles me; she is very charming, very striking, very lovable, but she puzzles me! I have a presentiment that that child will give me a world of anxiety, an infinitude of trouble!"

And Lady Marabout laid her head on the pillow, not the happier that Flora Montolieu was lying asleep in the room next her, dreaming of the wild-vine shadows and the night-blooming flowers of her native tropics, under the rose-curtains of her new home in Lowndes-square, already a burden on the soul and a responsibility on the mind of that home's most genial and generous mistress.

"If she were a man I should certainly call her a detrimental," said Lady Marabout, after a more deliberate study of her charge. "You know, my dear Philip, the sort of man one calls detrimental; attractive enough to do a great deal of damage, and ineligible enough to make the damage very unacceptable: handsome and winning, but a younger son, or a something nobody wants; a delightful flirtation, but a terrible alliance; you know what I mean! Well, that is just what this little Montolieu is in our sex; I am quite sure it is what she will be considered; and if it be bad for a man, it is very much worse for a woman! Everybody will admire her, and nobody will marry her; I have a presentiment of it!"

With which prophetical mélange of the glorious and the inglorious for her charge's coming career, Lady Marabout sighed, and gave a little shiver, such as

> Sur des maux ignorés nous fait gémir d'avance,

as Delphine Gay well phrased it. And she floated out of her boudoir to the dining-room for luncheon, at which unformal and pleasant meal Carruthers chanced to stay, criticise a new dry sherry, and take a look at this unsalable young filly of the Marabout Yearling Sales.

"I don't know about her being detrimental, mother, nor about her being little; she is more than middle height," laughed he; "but I vow she is the prettiest thing you've had in your list for some time. You've had much greater beauties, you say? Well, perhaps so; but I bet you any money she will make a sensation."

"I am sure she will," reiterated Lady Marabout despairingly. "I have no doubt she will have a brilliant season; there is something very piquante, taking, and uncommon about her; but who will marry her at the end of it?"

Carruthers shouted with laughter.

"Heaven forbid that I should attempt to prophesy! I would undertake as readily to say who'll be the owner of the winner of the Oaks ten years hence! I can tell you who *won't*——"

"Yourself; because you'll never marry anybody at all," cried Lady Marabout. "Well! I must say I should not wish you to renounce your misogamistic notions here. The Montolieus are not at all what *you* should look for; and a child like Flora would be excessively ill suited to you. If I could see you married, as I should desire, to some woman of weight and dignity, five or six-and-twenty, fit for you in every way——"

"*De grace, de grace!* My dear mother, the mere sketch will kill me if you insist on finishing it! Be reasonable! Can anything be more comfortable, more tranquil, than I am now? I swing through life in a rocking-chair; if I'm a trifle bored now and then, it's my heaviest trial. I float as pleasantly on the waves of London life, in my way, as the lotus-eaters of poetry on the Ganges in theirs; and *you'd* have the barbarity to introduce into my complacent existence the sting of matrimony, the phosphorus of Hymen's torch, the symbolical serpent of a wedding-ring?—for shame!"

Lady Marabout laughed despite herself, and the solemnity, in *her* eyes, of the subject.

"I *should* like to see you happily married, for all that, though I quite despair of it now; but perhaps you are right."

"Of course I am right! Adam was tranquil and unworried till fate sent him a wife, and he was typical of the destinies of his descendants. Those who are wise take warning; those who are not, neglect it, and repent. Lady

Hautton et C^ie^ are very fond of twisting scriptural obscurities into 'types.' *There's* a type plain as day, and salutary to mankind, if detrimental to women!"

"Philip, you are abominable! don't be so wicked!" cried Lady Marabout, enjoying it all the more because she was a little shocked at it, as your best women will on occasion; human nature is human nature everywhere, and the female heart gives pleasurable little pulses at the sight of forbidden fruits now, as in the days of Eve.

"Who's that Miss Montolieu with your mother this year, Phil?" dozens of men asked Carruthers that season, across the mess-table, in the smoking-room of the Guards, in the Ride or the Ring, in the doorways of ball-rooms, or anywhere where such-like questions are asked and new pretty women discussed.

"What is it in her that takes so astonishingly?" wondered Lady Marabout, who is, like most women, orthodox on all points, loving things by rule, worrying if they go out of the customary routine, and was therefore quite incapable of reconciling herself to so revolutionary a fact as a young lady being admired who was not a beauty, and sought while she was detrimental in every way. It was "out of the general rule," and your orthodox people hate anything "out of the general run," as they hate their prosperous friends: the force of hatred can no further go! Flora Montolieu's crime in Belgravia was much akin to the Bonapartes' crimes to the Bourbons. Thrones must be filled legitimately if not worthily, in the eyes of the orthodox people, and this Petit Caporal of Lady Marabout's had no business to reign where the hereditary Princesses and all the other noble lines failed to sway the sceptre. Lady Marabout, belonging to the noble lines herself, agreed in her heart with them, and felt a little bit guilty to have introduced this democratic and unwelcome element into society.

Flora Montolieu "took," as people say of bubble companies, meaning that they will pleasantly ruin a million or two: or of new fashions, meaning that they will become general with the many and, *sequitur*, unwearable with the few. She had the brilliance and grace of one of her own tropical flowers, with something piquante and attractive about her that one had to leave nameless, but that was all the more charming for that very fact perhaps; full of life and animation, but soft as a gazelle, as her chaperone averred; not characterless, as Lady Marabout fondly desired (on the same principle, I suppose, as a timid whip likes a horse as spiritless as a riding-school hack), but gifted with plenty of very marked character, so much, indeed, that it rather puzzled her *camériste.*

"Girls shouldn't have marked character; they should be clay that one can mould, not a self-chiselled statuette, that will only go into its own niche, and won't go into any other. This little Montolieu would make just such a woman as Vittoria Colonna or Madame de Sablé, but one doesn't want *those* qualities in a girl who is but a single little ear in the wheat-sheaf of society, and whom one wants to marry off, but can't expect to marry well. Her poor mother, of course, will look to me to do something advantageous for her, and I verily believe she is that sort of girl that will let me do nothing," thought Lady Marabout, already beginning to worry, as she talked to Lady George Frangipane at a breakfast in Palace Gardens, and watched Flora Montolieu, with Carruthers on her left and Greenwood on her right, amusing them both, to all semblance, and holding her own to the Lady Hauttons' despite, who held *their* own so excessively chillily and loftily that no ordinary mortals cared to approach them, but, beholding them, thought involuntarily of the stately icebergs off the Spitzbergen coast, only that the icebergs *could* melt or explode when their time came, and the time was never known when the Hautton service could be moved to anger or melt to any sunshine whatever. At least, whether their maids or their mother ever beheld the first of the phenomena, far be it from me to say, but the world never saw either.

"Well, Miss Montolieu, how do you like our life here?" Carruthers was asking. "Which is preferable—Belgravia or St. Denis?"

"Oh, Belgravia, decidedly," laughed Lady Marabout's charge. "I think your life charming. All change, excitement, gaiety, who would not like it?"

"Nobody—that is not fresh to it!"

"Fresh to it? Ah! are you one of the class who find no beauty in anything unless it is new? If so, do not charge the blame on to the thing, as your tone implies; take it rather to yourself and your own fickleness."

"Perhaps I do," smiled Carruthers. "But whether oneself or 'the thing' is to blame, the result's much the same—satiety! Wait till you have had two or three seasons, and then tell me if you find this mill-wheel routine, these circus gyrations, so delightful! We are the performing stud, who go round and round in the hippodrome, day after day for show, till we are sick of the whole programme, knowing our white stars are but a daub of paint, and our gay spangles only tinfoil. You are a little pony just joined to the troupe, and just pleased with the glitter of the arena. Wait till you've had a few years of it before you say whether going through the same hoops and passing over the same sawdust is so very amusing."

"If I do not, I shall desert the troupe, and form a circus of my own, less mechanical and more enjoyable."

"*Il faut souffrir pour être belle, il faut souffrir encore plus pour être à la mode!*" said Goodwood, on her right, while Lady Egidia Hautton thought, "How bold that little Montolieu is!" and her sister, Lady Feodorowna, wondered what her cousin Goodwood *could* see there.

"I do not see the necessity," interrupted Flora, "and I certainly would never bow to the 'il faut.' I would make fashion follow me; I would not follow fashion." ("That child talks as though she were the Duchess of Amandine," thought Lady Marabout, catching fragmentary portions across the table, the Marabout oral and oracular organs being always conveniently multiplied when she was armed cap-à-pie as a chaperone.) "Sir Philip, you talk as if you belonged to the 'nothing-is-new, and nothing-is-true, and it-don't-signify' class. I should have thought you were above the nil admirari affectation."

"He admires, as we all do, when we find something that compels our homage," said Goodwood, with an emphasis that would have made the hearts of any of the Hereditary Princesses palpitate with gratification, but at which the ungrateful Petit Caporal only glanced at him a little surprisedly with her large hazel eyes, as though she by no means saw the point of the speech.

Carruthers laughed.

"Nil admirari? Oh no. I enjoy life, but then it is thanks to the clubs, my yacht, my cigar-case, my stud, a thousand things,—not thanks at all to Belgravia."

"Complimentary to the Belgraviennes!" cried Flora, with a shrug of her shoulders. "They have not known how to amuse you, then?"

"Ladies never *do* amuse us," sighed Carruthers. "*Tant pis pour nous!*"

"Are you going to Lady Patchouli's this evening?" asked Goodwood.

"I believe we are. I think Lady Marabout said so."

"Then I shall exert myself, and go too. It will be a terrible bore—balls always are. But to waltz with *you* I will try to encounter it!"

Flora Montolieu arched her eyebrows, and gave him a little disdainful glance.

"Lord Goodwood, do not be so sure that I shall waltz at all with you. If *you* take vanity for wit, *I* cannot accept discourtesy as compliment!"

"Well hit, little lady!" thought Carruthers, with a mental bravissima.

"What a speech!" thought Lady Marabout, across the table, as shocked as though a footman had dropped a cascade of iced hock over her.

"You got it for once, Goodwood," laughed Carruthers, as they drove away in his tilbury. "You never had such a sharp brush as that."

"By Jove, no! Positively it was quite a new sensation—refreshing, indeed! One grows so tired of the women who agree with one eternally. She's charming, on my word. Who *is* she, Phil? In an heraldic sense, I mean."

"My dear child, what could possess you to answer Lord Goodwood like that?" cried Lady Marabout, as her barouche rolled down Palace Gardens.

"Possess me? The Demon of Mischief, I suppose."

"But, my love, it was a wonderful compliment from him!"

"Was it? I do not see any compliment in those vain impertinent, Brummelian amour-propreisms. I must coin the word, there is no good one to express it."

"But, my dear Flora, you know he is the Marquis of Goodwood, the Duke of Doncaster's son! It is not as if he were a boy in the Lancers, or an unfledged *petit maître* from the Foreign Office——"

"Were he her Majesty's son, he should not gratify his vanity at my expense! If he expected me to be flattered by his condescension, he mistook me very much. He has been allowed to adopt that tone, I suppose; but from a man to a woman a chivalrous courtesy is due, though the man be an emperor."

"Perhaps so—of course; but that *is* their tone now-a-days, my love, and you cannot alter it. I always say the Regency-men inaugurated it, and their sons and grandsons out-Herod Herod. But to turn a tide, or to be a wit with impunity, a woman wants to occupy a prominent and unassailable position. Were you the Duchess of Amandine you might say that sort of thing, but a young girl just out *must not*—indeed she must not! The Hauttons heard you, and the Hauttons are very merciless people; perfectly bred themselves, and pitiless on the least infringment of the convenances. Besides, ten to one you may have gained Goodwood's ill will; and he is a man whose word has immense weight, I assure you."

"I do not see anything remarkable in him to give him weight," said the literal and unimpressible little Montolieu. "He is a commonplace person to my taste, neither so brilliant nor so handsome by a great deal as many gentlemen I see—as Philip, for instance, Lady Marabout!"

"As my son! No, my love, he is not; very few men have Philip's talents and person," said Lady Marabout, consciously mollified and propitiated, but going on, nevertheless, with a Spartan impartiality highly laudable. "Goodwood's rank, however, is much higher than Philip's (at least it stands so, though really the Carruthers are by far the older, dating as far back as Ethelbert II., while the Doncaster family are literally unknown till the fourteenth century, when Gervaise d'Ascotte received the acolade before Ascalon from Godfrey de Bouillon): Goodwood *has* great weight, my dear, in the best circles. A compliment from him is a great compliment to any woman, and the sort of answer you gave him——"

"Must have been a great treat to him, dear Lady Marabout, if every one is in the habit of kow-towing before him. Princes, you know, are never so happy as when they can have a little bit of nature; and my speech must have been as refreshing to

Lord Goodwood as the breath of his Bearnese breezes and the freedom of his Pyrenean forests were to Henri Quatre after the court etiquette and the formal ceremonial of Paris."

"I don't know about its being a treat to him, my dear; it was more likely to be a shower-bath. And your illustration isn't to the point. The Bearnese breezes were Henri Quatre's native air, and might be pleasant to him; but the figurative ones are not Goodwood's, and I am sure cannot please him."

"But Lady Marabout, I do not want to please him!" persisted the young lady, perversely. "I don't care in the least what he thinks, or what he says of me!"

"Dear me, how oddly things go!" thought Lady Marabout. "There was Valencia, one of the proudest girls in England, his equal in every way, an acknowledged beauty, who would have said the dust on the trottoir was diamonds, and worn turquoises on azureline, or emeralds on rose, I verily believe, if such opticisms and gaucheries had been Goodwood's taste; and here is this child—for whom the utmost one can do will be to secure a younger son out of the Civil Service, or a country member—cannot be made to see that he is of an atom more importance than Soames or Mason, and treats him with downright nonchalant indifference. What odd anomalies one sees in everything!"

"Who *is* that young lady with you this season?" Lady Hautton asked, smiling that acidulated smile with which that amiable saint always puts long questions to you of which she knows the answer would be *peine forte et dure*. "Not the daughter of that horrid John Montolieu, who did all sorts of dreadful things, and was put into a West India regiment? Indeed! that man? Dear me! Married the sister of your incumbent at Fernditton? Ah, really!—very singular! But how do you come to have brought out the daughter?"

At all of which remarks Lady Marabout winced, and felt painfully guilty of a gross democratic dereliction from legitimate and beaten paths, conscious of having sinned heavily in the eyes of the world and Lady Hautton, by bringing within the sacred precincts of Belgravia the daughter of a *mauvais sujet* in a West India corps, and a sister of a perpetual curate. The world was a terrible dragon to Lady Marabout; to her imagination it always appeared an incarnated and omniscient bugbear, Argus-eyed, and with all its hundred eyes relentlessly fixed on her, spying out each item of her short-comings, every little flaw in the Marabout diamonds, any spur-made tear in her Honiton flounces, any crease in her train at a Drawing-room, any lèse-majesté against the royal rule of conventionalities, any glissade on the polished oak floor of society, though like a good many other people she often worried herself needlessly; the flaws, tears, creases, high treasons, and false glissades being fifty to one too infinitesimal or too unimportant to society for one of the hundred eyes (vigilant and unwinking though I grant they are) to take note of them. The world was a terrible bugbear to Lady Marabout, and its special impersonation was Anne Hautton. She disliked Anne Hautton; she didn't esteem her; she knew her to be a narrow, censorious, prejudiced, and strongly malicious lady; but she was the personification of the World to Lady Marabout, and had weight and terror in consequence. Lady Marabout is not the first person who has burnt incense and bowed in fear before a little miserable clay image she cordially despised, for no better reason—for the self-same reason, indeed.

"She evidently thinks I ought not to have brought Flora out; and perhaps I shouldn't; though, poor little thing, it seems very hard she may not enjoy society—fitted for society, too, as she is—just because her father is in a West India regiment, and poor Lilla was only a clergyman's daughter. Goodwood really seems to admire her. I can never forgive him for his heartless flirtation with Valencia; but if he *were* to be won by a Montolieu, what would the Hauttons say?"

And sitting against the wall, with others of her sisterhood, at a ball, a glorious and golden vision rose up before Lady Marabout's eyes.

If the unknown, unwelcome, revolutionary little Montolieu should go in and win where the Lady Hauttons had tried and failed through five seasons—if this little tropical flower should be promoted to the Doncaster conservatory, where all the stately stephanotises of the peerage had vainly aspired to bloom—if this Petit Caporal should be crowned with the Doncaster diadem, that all the legitimate rulers had uselessly schemed to place on their brows! The soul of Lady Marabout rose elastic at the bare prospect—it would be as great a triumph for a chaperone as for a general to conquer a valuable position with a handful of boy recruits.

If it *should* be! Anne Hautton would have nothing to say after *that!*

And Lady Marabout, though she was the most amiable lady in Christendom, was not exempt from a feeling of longing for a stone to roll to the door of her enemy's stronghold, or a flourish of trumpets to silence the boastful and triumphant *fanfare* that was perpetually sounding at sight of her defeats, from her opponent's ramparts.

Wild, visionary, guiltily scheming, sinfully revolutionary seemed such a project in her eyes. Still, how tempting! It would be a terrible blow to Valencia, who'd tried for Goodwood fruitlessly, to be eclipsed by this unknown Flora; it would be a terrible blow to their Graces of Doncaster, who held nobody good enough, heraldically speaking, for their heir-apparent, to see him give the best coronet in England to a bewitching little interloper, sans money, birth, or rank. "They wouldn't like it, of course; I shouldn't like it for Philip, for instance, though she's a very sweet little thing; all the Ascottes would be very vexed, and all the Valletorts would never forgive it; but it would be *such* a triumph over Anne Hautton!" pondered Lady Marabout, and the last clause carried the day. Did you ever know private pique fail to carry the day over public charity?

And Lady Marabout glanced with a glow of prospective triumph, which,though erring to her Order was delicious to her individuality, at Goodwood waltzing with the little Montolieu a suspicious number of times, while Lady Egidia Hautton was condemned to his young brother, Seton Ascotte, and Lady Feodorowna danced positively with nobody better than their own county member, originally a scion of Goodwood's bankers! Could the force of humiliation further go? Lady Hautton sat smiling and chatting, but the tiara on her temples was a figurative thorn crown, and Othello's occupation was gone. When a lady's daughters are dancing with an unavailable *cadet* of twenty, and a parvenu, only acceptable in the last extremities of despair, what good is it for her to watch the smiles and construe the attentions?

"We shall see who triumphs now," thought Lady Marabout, with a glow of pleasure, for which her heart reproached her a moment afterwards. "It is very wrong," she thought; "if those poor girls don't marry, one ought to pity them; and as for her—going through five seasons, with a fresh burden of responsibility leaving the schoolroom, and added on your hands each year, *must* sour the sweetest temper; it would do mine, I am sure. I dare say, if I had had daughters, I should have been ten times more worried even than I am."

Which she would have been, undoubtedly, and the eligibles on her visiting-list ten times more too! Men wouldn't have voted the Marabout dinners and soirées so pleasant as they did, under the sway of that sunshiny hostess, if there had been Lady Maudes and Lady Marys to exact attention, and lay mines under the Auxerre carpets, and man-traps among the épergne flowers of Lowndes-square. Nor would Lady Marabout have been the same; the sunshine couldn't have shone so brightly, nor the milk of roses flowed so mildly under the weight and wear of marriageable but unmarried daughters; the sunshine would have been fitful, the milk of roses curdled at best. And no wonder! Those poor women! they have so much to go through in the world, and play but such a monotonous rôle, taken at its most brilliant and best, from first to last, from cradle to grave, from the berceaunettes in which they commence their existence to the mausoleum in which they finish it. If they *do* get a little bit soured when they have finished their own game, and have to sit at the card-tables, wide awake, however weary, vigilant however drowsy, alert however bored to death, superintending the hands of the fresh players, surreptitiously suggesting means for securing the tricks, keeping a dragon's eye out for revokes, and bearing all the brunt of the blame if the rubber be lost—if they do get a little bit soured, who can, after all greatly wonder?

"That's a very brilliant little thing, that girl Montolieu," said Goodwood, driving over to Hornsey Wood, the morning after, with Carruthers and some other men, in his drag.

"A deuced pretty waltzer!" said St. Lys, of the Bays; "turn her round in a square foot."

"And looks very well in the saddle; sits her horse better than any woman in the Ride, except Rosalie Rosière, and as she came from the Cirque Olympique originally, one don't count *her*," said Fulke Nugent. "I *do* like a woman to ride well, I must say. I promised your mother to take a look at the Marabout Yearlings' Sale, Phil, if ever I wanted the never-desirable and ever-burdensome article she has to offer, and if anything could tempt me to pay the price she asks, I think it would be that charming Montolieu."

"She's the best thing Lady Tattersall ever had on hand," said Goodwood, drawing his whip over his off-wheeler's back. "You know, Phil—gently, gently, Coronet!—what spoilt your handsome cousin was, as I said, that it was all mechanism; perfect mechanism, I admit, but all artificial, pre-arranged, put together, wound up to smile in this place, bow in that, and frown in the other; clockwork every inch of it! Now—so-ho, Zouave! confound you, *won't* you be quiet?—little Montolieu hasn't a bit of artifice about her: 'tisn't only that you don't know what she's going to say, but that *she* doesn't either; and whether it's a smile or a frown, a jest or a reproof, it's what the moment brings out, not what's planned beforehand."

"The hard hit you had the other day seems to have piqued your interest," said Carruthers, smoothing a loose leaf of his Manilla."

"Naturally. The girl didn't care a button about my compliment (I only said it to try her), and the plucky answer she gave me amused me immensely. Anything unartificial and frank is as refreshing as hock-and-seltzer after a field-day—one likes it, don't you know?"

"Wonderfully eloquent you are, Goody. If you come out like that in St. Stephen's, we shan't know you, and the ministerialists will look down in the mouth with a vengeance!"

"Don't be satirical, Phil! If I admire Mademoiselle Flora, what is it to you, pray?"

"Nothing at all," said Carruthers, with unnecessary rapidity of enunciation.

"My love, what are you going to wear to-night? The Bishop of Bonviveur is coming. He was a college friend of your poor uncle's; knew your dear mother before she married. I want you to look your very best and charm him, as you certainly do most people," said Lady Marabout. Adroit intriguer! The bishop was going, sans doute; the bishop loved good wine, good dinners, and good society, and found all three in Lowndes-square, but the bishop was entirely unavailable for purposes matrimonial, having had three wives, and being held tight in hand by a fourth; however, a bishop is a convenient piece to cover your king, in chess, and the bishop served admirably just then in Lady Marabout's moves as a *locum tenens* for Goodwood. Flora Montolieu, in her innocence, made herself look her prettiest for her mother's old friend, and Flora Montolieu was conveniently ready, looking her prettiest, for her chaperone's Pet Eligible, when Goodwood—who hated to dine anywhere in London except at the clubs, the Castle, or the Guards' mess, and was as difficult to get for your dinners as birds'-nests soup or Tokay pur—entered the Marabout drawing-rooms.

"Anne Hautton will see he dined here to-night, in the *Morning Post* to-morrow morning, and she will know Flora must attract him very unusually. What *will* she, and Egidia, Feodorowna say?" thought Lady Marabout, with a glow of pleasure, which she was conscious was uncharitable and sinful, and yet couldn't repress, let her try how she might.

In scheming for the future Duke of Doncaster for John Montolieu's daughter, she felt much as democratically and treasonably guilty to her order as a Prince of the blood might feel heading a Chartist émeute; but then, suppose the Chartist row was that Prince's sole chance of crushing an odious foe, as it was the only chance for her to humiliate the Hautton, don't you think it might look tempting? Judge nobody, my good sir, till you've been in similar circumstances yourself—a golden rule, which might with advantage employ those illuminating colours with which ladies employ so much of their time just now. Remembering it, they might hold their white hands from flinging those sharp flinty stones, that surely suit them so ill, and that soil their fingers in one way quite as much as they soil the victim's bowed head in another. Illuminate the motto, mesdames and demoiselles! Perhaps you *will* do that—on a smalt ground, with a gold Persian arabasque round, and impossible flowers twined in and out of the letters; but, *remember* it!—pardon! It were asking too much.

"My dear Philip, did you notice how very marked Goodwood's attentions were to Flora last night?" asked Lady Marabout, the morning after, in one of her most sunshiny and radiant moods, as Carruthers paid her his general matutinal call in her boudoir.

"Marked?"

"Yes, marked! Why do you repeat it in that tone? If they *were* marked, there is nothing to be ridiculed that I see. They were very marked indeed, especially for him; he's such an unimpressible, never-show-anything man. I wonder you did not notice it!"

"My dear mother!" said Carruthers, a little impatiently, brushing up the Angora cat's ruff the wrong way with his cane, "do you suppose I pass my evenings noticing the attentions other men may see fit to pay to young ladies?"

"Well—don't be impatient. You never used to be," said Lady Marabout. "If you were in my place just for a night or two, or any other chaperone's, you'd be more full of pity. But people never *will* sympathise with anything that doesn't touch themselves. The only chords that strike the key-note in anybody is the chord that sounds 'self;' and that is the reason why the world is as full of crash and tumult as Beethoven's 'Storm.'"

"Quite right, my dear mother!"

"Of course it's quite right. I always think you have a great deal of sympathy for a man, Philip, even for people you don't harmonize with—(you could sympathise with that child Flora, yesterday, in her rapturous delight at seeing that Coccoloba Uvifera in the Patchouli conservatory, because it reminded her of her West Indian home, and you care nothing whatever about flowers, nor yet about the West Indies, I should suppose)—but you never will sympathise with me. You know how many disappointments and grievances and vexations of every kind I have had the last ten, twenty, ay, thirty, forty seasons—ever since I had to chaperone your Aunt Eleanore, almost as soon as I was married, and was worried, more than anybody ever *was* worried, by her coquetries and her inconsistencies and her vacillations—so badly as she married, too, at the last! Those flirting beauties so often do; they throw away a hundred admirable chances and put up with a wretched *dernier ressort*;—let a thousand salmon break away from the line out of their carelessness, and end by being glad to land a little minnow. I don't know when I *haven't* been worried by chaperoning. Flora Montolieu is a great anxiety, a great difficulty, little detrimental that she is!"

"Detrimental! What an odd word you choose for her."

"I don't choose it for her; she *is* it," returned Lady Marabout, decidedly.

"How so?"

"How so! Why, my dear Phillip, I told you the very first day she came. How so! when she is John Montolieu's daughter, when she has no birth to speak of, and not a farthing to her fortune."

"If she were Jack Ketch's daughter you could not speak much worse. Her high-breeding might do credit to a Palace; I only wish one found it in all Palaces! and I never knew you before measure people by their money."

"My dear Philip, no more I do. I can't bear you when you speak in that tone; it's so hard and sarcastic and unlike you. *I* don't know what you mean either. I should have thought a man of the world like yourself knew well enough what I intend when I say Flora is a detrimental. She has a sweet temper, very clever, very lively, very charming, as any one knows by the number of men that crowd about her, but a detrimental she is——"

"Poor little heart!" muttered Carruthers in his beard, too low for his mother to hear.

"—And yet I am quite positive that if she herself act judiciously, and it is well managed for her, Goodwood may be won before the season is over," concluded Lady Marabout.

Carruthers, not feeling much interest, it is presumed, in the exclusively feminine pursuit of match-making, returned no answer, but played with Bijou's silver bells, and twisted his own tawny moustaches.

"I am quite positive it *may be*, if properly managed," reiterated Lady Marabout. "You might second me a little, Philip."

"*I?* Good Heavens! my dear mother, what are you thinking of? I would sooner turn torreador, and throw lassos over bulls at Madrid, than help you to fling nuptial cables over poor devils in Belgravia. Twenty to one! I'm going to the Yard to look at a bay filly of Cope Fielden's, and then on to a mess-luncheon of the Bays."

"Must you go?" said his mother, looking lovingly on him. "You look tired, Philip. Don't you feel well?"

"Perfectly; but Cambridge had us out over those confounded Wormwood Scrubs this morning, and three hours in this June sun, in our harness, makes one swear. If it were a sharp brush, it would put life into one; as it is, it only inspires one with an intense suffering from boredom, and an intense desire for hock-and-seltzer."

"I am very glad you haven't a sharp brush as you call it, for all that," said Lady Marabout. "It might be very pleasant to you, Philip, but it wouldn't be quite so much so to me. I wish you would stay to luncheon."

"Not to-day, thanks; I have so many engagements."

"You have been very good in coming to see me this season—even better than usual. It *is* very good of you, with all your amusements and distractions. You have given me a great many days this month," said Lady Marabout gratefully. "Anne Hautton sees nothing of Hautton, she says, except at a distance in Pall-Mall or the Park, all the season through. Fancy if I saw no more of you! Do you know, Philip, I am almost reconciled to your never marrying. I have never seen anybody I should like at all for you, unless you had chosen Cecil Ormsby—Cecil Cheveley I mean; and I am sure I should be very jealous of your wife if you had one. I couldn't help it."

"Rest tranquil, my dear mother; you will never be put to the test!" said Carruthers, with a laugh, as he bid her good morning.

"Perhaps it *is* best he shouldn't marry: I begin to think so," mused Lady Marabout, as the door closed on him. "I used to wish it very much for some things. He is the last of his name, and it seems a pity; there ought to be an heir for Deepdene; but still marriage *is* such a lottery (he is right enough there, though I don't admit it to him: it's a tombola where there is one prize to a million of blanks; one can't help seeing that, though, on principle, I never allow it to him or any of his men), and if Philip had any woman who didn't appreciate him, or didn't understand him, or didn't make him happy, how wretched *I* should be! I have often pictured Philip's wife to myself, I have often idealised a sort of woman I should like to see him marry, but it's very improbable I shall ever meet my ideal realised; one never does! And, after all, whenever I have fancied, years ago, he *might* be falling in love, I have always felt a horrible dread lest she shouldn't be worthy of him—a jealous fear of her that I could not conquer. It's much better as it is; there is no woman good enough for him."

With which compliment to Carruthers at her sex's expense Lady Marabout returned to weaving her pet projected toils for the ensnaring of Goodwood, for whom also, if asked, I dare say the Duchess of Doncaster would have averred on *her* part, looking through *her* maternal Claude glasses, no woman *is* good enough either. When ladies have daughters to marry, men always present to their imaginations a battalion of worthless, decalogue-smashing, utterly unreliable individuals, amongst whom there is not one fit to be trusted or fit to be chosen; but when their sons are the candidates for the holy bond, they view all women through the same foggy and non-embellishing medium, which, if it does not speak very much for their unprejudiced discernment, at least speaks to the oft-disputed fact of the equality of merit in the sexes, and would make it appear that, in vulgar parlance, there must be six of the one and half a dozen of the other.

"Flora, soft and careless, and rebellious as she looks, *is* ambitious, and has set her heart on winning Goodwood, I do believe, as much as ever poor Valencia did. True, she takes a different plan of action, as Philip would call it, and treats him with gay, nonchalante indifference, which certainly seems to pique him more than ever my poor niece's beauty and quiet deference to his opinions did; but that is because she reads him better, and knows more cleverly how to rouse him. She has set her heart on winning Goodwood I am certain, ambitious as it seems. How eagerly she looked out for the Blues yesterday at that Hyde Park inspection—though I am sure Goodwood does not look half so handsome as Philip does in harness, as they call it; Philip is so much the finer man! I will just sound her to-day—or to-night as we come back from the Opera," thought Lady Marabout one morning.

Things were moving to the very best of her expectations. Learning experience from manifold failures, Lady Marabout had laid her plans this time with a dexterity that defied discomfiture: seconded by both the parties primarily necessary to the accomplishment of her manœuvres, with only a little outer-world opposition to give it piquancy and excitement, she felt that she might defy the fates to checkmate her here. This should be her Marathon and Lemnos, which, simply reverted to, should be sufficient to secure her immunity from the attacks of any feminine Xantippus who should try to rake up her failures and tarnish her glory. To win Goodwood with a nobody's daughter would be a feat as wonderful in its way as for Miltiades to have passed "in a single day and with a north wind," as Oracle exacted, to the conquest of the Pelasgian Isles; and Lady Marabout longed to do it, as you, my good sir, may have longed in your day to take a king in check with your only available pawn, or win one of the ribands of the turf with a little filly that seemed to general judges scarcely calculated to be in the first flight at the Chester Consolation Scramble.

Things were beautifully in train; it even began to dawn on the perceptions of the Hauttons, usually very slow to open to anything revolutionary and unwelcome. Her Grace of Doncaster, a large, lethargic, somnolent dowager, rarely awake to anything but the interests and restoration of the old ultra-Tory party in a Utopia, always dreamed of and never realised, like many other Utopias political and poetical, public and personal, had turned her eyes on Flora Montolieu, and asked her son the question inevitable, "*Who* is she?" to which Goodwood had replied with a devil-may-care recklessness and a headlong indefiniteness which grated on her Grace's ears, and imparted her no information whatever: "One of Lady Tattersall's yearlings, and the most charming creature *I* ever met. You know that? Why did you ask me, then? You know all I do, and all I care to do!"—a remark that made the Duchess wish her very dear and personal friend, Lady Marabout, were comfortably and snugly interred in the mausoleum at Fernditton, rather than alive in the flesh in Belgravia, chaperoning young ladies whom nobody knew, and who were not to be found in any of Sir B. Burke's triad of volumes.

Belgravia, and her sister Mayfair, wondered at it, and talked over it, raked the parental Montolieu lineage mercilessly, and found out, from the Bishop of Bonviveur and Sauceblanche, that the uncle on the distaff side had been only a Tug at Eton, and had lived and died at Fernditton a perpetual curate and nothing else—not even a dean, not even a rector! Goodwood *couldn't* be serious, settled the coteries. But the more hints, innuendoes, questions, and adroitly concealed but simply suggested animadversion Lady Marabout received, the greater was her glory, the warmer her complacency, when she saw her Little Montolieu, who was not little at all, leading, as she undoubtedly did lead, the most desired eligible of the day captive in her chains, sent bouquets by him, begged for waltzes by him, followed by him at the Ride, riveting his lorgnon at the Opera, monopolising his attention—though, clever little intriguer, she knew too well how to pique him ever to let him monopolise hers.

"She certainly makes play, as Philip would call it, admirably with Goodwood," said Lady Marabout, admiringly at a morning party, stirring a cup of Orange Pekoe, yet with a certain irrepressible feeling that she should almost prefer so very young a girl not to be quite so adroit a schemer at seventeen. "That indifference and nonchalance is the very thing to pique and retain such a courted fastidious creature as Goodwood; and she knows it, too. Now a clumsy casual observer might even fancy that she liked some others—even you, Philip, for instance—much better; she talks to you much more, appeals to you twice as often, positively teases you to stop and lunch or come to dinner here, and really told you the other night at the Opera she missed you when you didn't come in the morning; but to anybody who knows anything of the world, it is easy enough to see which way her inclinations (yes, I *do* hope it is inclination as well as ambition—I am not one of those who advocate pure *mariages de convenance*; I don't think them right, indeed, though they are undoubtedly very expedient sometimes) turn. I do not think *anybody* ever could prove me to have erred in my quick-sightedness in those affairs. I may have been occasionally mistaken in other things, or been the victim of adverse and unforeseen circumstances which were beyond my control, and betrayed me; but I know no one can read a girl's heart more quickly and surely than I, or a man's either for that matter."

"Oh, we all know you are a clairvoyante in heart episodes, my dear mother; they are the one business of your life!" smiled Carruthers, setting down his ice, and lounging across the lawn to a group of cedars, where Flora Montolieu stood playing at croquet, and who, like a scheming adventuress as she was, immediately verified Lady Marabout's words, and piqued Goodwood à outrance by avowing herself tired of the game, and entering with animated verve into the prophecies for Ascot with Carruthers, whose bay filly Sunbeam, sister to Wild-Falcon, was entered to run for the Queen's Cup.

"What an odd smile that was of Philip's," thought Lady Marabout, left to herself and her Orange Pekoe. "He has been very intimate with Goodwood ever since they joined the Blues, cornets together, three-and-twenty years ago; surely he can't have heard him drop anything that would make him fancy he was *not serious?*"

An idle fear, which Lady Marabout dismissed contemptuously from her mind when she saw how entirely Goodwood —in defiance of the Hautton's sneer, the drowsy Duchess's unconcealed frown, all the comments sure to be excited in feminine minds, and all the chaff likely to be elicited from masculine lips at the mess-table, and in the U.S., and in the Guards' box before the curtain went up for the ballet—vowed himself to the service of the little detrimental throughout that morning party, and spoke a temporary adieu, whose tenderness, if she did not exactly catch, Lady Marabout could at least construe, as he pulled up the tiger-skin over Flora's dainty dress, before the Marabout carriage rolled down the Fulham-road to town. At which tenderness of farewell Carruthers—steeled to all such weaknesses himself—gave a disdainful glance and a contemptuous twist of his moustaches, as he stood by the door talking to his mother.

"You too, Phil?" said Goodwood, with a laugh, as the carriage rolled away.

Carruthers stared at him haughtily, as he will stare at his best friends if they touch his private concerns more nearly than he likes; a stare which said disdainfully, "I don't understand you," and thereby told the only lie to which Carruthers ever stooped in the whole course of his existence.

Goodwood laughed again.

"If you poach on my manor *here*, I shall kill you, Phil; so *gare à vous!*"

"You are in an enigmatical mood to-day! I can't say I see much wit in your riddles," said Carruthers, with his grandest and most contemptuous air, as he lit his Havannah.

"Confound that fellow! I'd rather have had any other man in London for a rival! Twenty and more years ago how he cut me out with that handsome Virginie Peauderose, that we were both such mad boys after in Paris. However, it will be odd if *I* can't win the day here. A Goodwood rejected—pooh! There isn't a woman in England that would do it!" thought Goodwood, as he drove down the Fulham-road.

"'*His* manor!' Who's told him it's his? And if it be, what is that to me?" thought Carruthers, as he got into his tilbury. "Philip, *you're* not a fool like the rest of them, I hope? You've not forsworn yourself surely? Pshaw!—nonsense!—impossible!"

"Certainly she *has* something very charming about her. If I were a man I don't think I could resist her," thought Lady Marabout, as she sat in her box in the grand tier, tenth from the Queen's, moving her fan slowly, lifting her lorgnon now and then, listening vaguely to the music of the second act of the "Barbiere," for probably about the two hundredth time in her life, and looking at Flora Montolieu, sitting opposite to her.

"The women are eternally asking me who she is. I don't care a hang *who*, but she's the prettiest thing in London," said Fulke Nugent, which was the warmest praise that any living man about town remembered to have heard fall from his lips, which limited themselves religiously to one legitimate laudation, which is a superlative now-a-days, though Mr. Lindley Murray, if alive, wouldn't, perhaps, receive or recognise it as such: "Not bad-looking."

"It isn't *who* a woman is, it's *what* she is, that's the question, I take it," said Goodwood, as he left the Guards' box to visit the Marabout.

"By George!" laughed Nugent to Carruthers, "Goody must be serious, eh, Phil? He don't care a button for little Bibi; he don't care even for Zerlina. When the ballet begins I verily believe he is thinking less of the women before him than of the woman who has left the house; and if a fellow can give more ominous signs of being 'serious,' as the women phrase it, I don't know 'em, do you?"

"I don't know much about that sort of thing at all!" muttered Carruthers, as he went out to follow Goodwood to the Marabout box.

That is an old, old story, that of the fair Emily stirring feud between Palamon and Arcite. It has been acted out many a time since Beaumont and Fletcher lived and wrote their twin-thoughts and won their twin-laurels; but the bars that shut the kinsmen in their prison-walls, the ivy-leaves that filled in the rents of their prison-stones, were not more entirely and blissfully innocent of the feud going on within, and the battle foaming near them, than the calm, complacent soul of Lady Marabout was of the rivalry going on close beside her for the sake of little Montolieu.

She certainly thought Philip made himself specially brilliant and agreeable that night; but then that was nothing new, he was famous for talking well, and liked his mother enough not seldom to shower out for her some of his very best things; certainly she thought Goodwood did not shine by the contrast, and looked, to use an undignified word, rather cross than otherwise; but then nobody *did* shine beside Philip, and she knew a reason that made Goodwood pardonably cross at the undesired presence of his oldest and dearest chum. Even *she* almost wished Philip away. If the presence of her idolised son could have been unwelcome to her at any time, it was so that night.

"It isn't like Philip to monopolise her so, he who has so much tact usually, and cares nothing for girls himself," thought Lady Marabout; "he must do it for mischief, and yet *that* isn't like him at all; it's very tiresome, at any rate."

And with that skilful diplomacy in such matters, on which, if it was sometimes overthrown, Lady Marabout not unjustly plumed herself, she dexterously entangled Carruthers in conversation, and during the crash of one of the choruses, whispered, as he bent forward to pick up her fan, which she had let drop, "Leave Flora a little to Goodwood; he has a right—he spoke decisively to her to-day."

Carruthers bowed his head, and stooped lower for the fan.

He left her accordingly to Goodwood till the curtain fell after the last act of the "Barbiere;" and Lady Marabout congratulated herself on her own adroitness. "There is nothing like a little tact," she thought; "what would society be without the guiding genius of tact, I wonder? One dreadful Donnybrook Fair!"

But, someway or other, despite all her tact, or because her son inherited that valuable quality in a triple measure to herself, someway, it was Goodwood who led her to her carriage, and Carruthers who led the little Montolieu.

"Terribly *bête* of Philip; how very unlike him!" mused Lady Marabout, as she gathered her burnous round her.

Carruthers talked and laughed as he led Flora Montolieu through the passages, more gaily, perhaps, than usual.

"My mother has told me some news to-night, Miss Montolieu," he said carelessly. "Am I premature in proffering you my congratulations? But even if I be so, you will not refuse the privilege to an old friend—to a very sincere friend—and will allow me to be the first to wish you happiness?"

Lady Marabout's carriage stopped the way. Flora Montolieu coloured, looked full at him, and went to it, without having time to answer his congratulations, in which the keenest-sighted hearer would have failed to detect anything beyond every-day friendship and genuine indifference. The most truthful men will make the most consummate actors when spurred up to it.

"My dear child, you look ill to-night; I am glad you have no engagements," said Lady Marabout, as she sat down before the dressing-room fire, toasting her little satin-shod foot—she has a weakness for fire even in the hottest weather—while Flora Montolieu lay back in a low chair, crushing the roses mercilessly. "You *do* feel well? I should not have thought so, your face looks so flushed, and your eyes so preternaturally dark. Perhaps it is the late hours; you were not used to them in France, of course, and it must be such a change to this life from your unvarying conventual routine at St. Denis. My love, what was it Lord Goodwood said to you to-day?"

"Do not speak to me of him, Lady Marabout, I hate his name!"

Lady Marabout started with an astonishment that nearly upset the cup of coffee she was sipping.

"Hate his name? My dearest Flora, why, in Heaven's name?"

Flora did not answer; she pulled the roses off her hair as though they had been infected with Brinvilliers' poison.

"What has he done?"

"*He* has done nothing!"

"Who has done anything, then?"

"Oh, no one—no one has done anything, but—I am sick of Lord Goodwood's name—tired of it!"

Lady Marabout sat almost speechless with surprise.

"Tired of it, my dear Flora!"

Little Montolieu laughed:

"Well, tired of it, perhaps from hearing him praised so often, as the Athenian trader grew sick of Aristides, and the Jacobin of Washington's name. Is it unpardonably heterodox to say so?"

Lady Marabout stirred her coffee in perplexity:

"My dear child, pray don't speak in that way; that's like Philip's tone when he is enigmatical and sarcastic, and worries me. I really cannot in the least understand you about Lord Goodwood, it is quite incomprehensible to me. I thought I overheard him to-day at Lady George's concert speak very definitely to you indeed, and when he was interrupted by the Duchess before you could give him his reply, I thought I heard him say he should call to-morrow morning to know your ultimate decision. Was I right?"

"Quite right."

"He really proposed marriage to you to-day?"

"Yes."

"And yet you say you are sick of his name?"

"Does it follow, imperatively, Lady Marabout, that because the Sultan throws his handkerchief it must be picked up with humility and thanksgiving?" asked Flora Montolieu, furling and unfurling her fan with an impatient rapidity that threatened entire destruction of its ivory and feathers, with their Watteau-like group elaborately painted on them—as pretty a toy of the kind as could be got for money, which had been given her by Carruthers one day in payment of some little bagatelle of a bet.

"Sultan!—Humility!" repeated Lady Marabout, scarcely crediting her senses. "My dear Flora, do you know what you are saying? You must be jesting! There is not a woman in England who would be insensible to the honour of Goodwood's proposals. You are jesting, Flora!"

"I am not, indeed!"

"You mean to say, you could positively think of *rejecting* him?" cried Lady Marabout, rising from her chair in the intensity of her amazement, convinced that she was the victim of some horrible hallucination.

"Why should it surprise you if I did?"

"*Why?*" repeated Lady Marabout, indignantly. "Do you ask me *why?* You must be a child indeed, or a consummate actress, to put such a question; excuse me, my dear, if I speak a little strongly: you perfectly bewilder me, and I confess I cannot see your motives or your meaning in the least. You have made a conquest such as the proudest women in the peerage have vainly tried to make; you have one of the highest titles in the country offered to you; you have won a man whom everybody declared would never be won; you have done this, pardon me, without either birth or fortune on your own side, and then you speak of rejecting Goodwood—Goodwood, of all the men in England! You cannot be serious, Flora, or, if you are you must be mad!"

Lady Marabout spoke more hotly than Lady Marabout had ever spoken in all her life. Goodwood absolutely won—Goodwood absolutely "come to the point"—the crowning humiliation of the Hauttons positively within her grasp—her Marathon and Lemnos actually gained! and all to be lost and flung away by the unaccountable caprice of a wayward child! It was sufficient to exasperate a saint, and a saint Lady Marabout never pretended to be.

Flora Montolieu toyed recklessly with her fan.

"You told Sir Philip this evening, I think of——"

"I hinted it to him, my dear, yes. Philip has known all along how much I desired it, and as Goodwood is one of his oldest and most favourite friends, I knew it would give him sincere pleasure both for my sake and Goodwood's, and yours too, for I think Philip likes you as much as he ever does any young girl—better, indeed; and I could not imagine—I could not dream for an instant—that there was any doubt of your acceptation, as, indeed, there *cannot* be. You have been jesting to worry me, Flora!"

Little Montolieu rose, threw her fan aside, as if its ivory stems had been hot iron, and leaned against the mantel-piece.

"You advise me to accept Lord Goodwood, then, Lady Marabout?"

"My love, if you need my advice, certainly!—such an alliance will never be proffered to you again; the brilliant position it will place you in I surely have no need to point out!" returned Lady Marabout. "The little hypocrite!" she mused, angrily, "as if her own mind were not fully made up—as if any girl in Europe would hesitate over accepting the Doncaster coronet—as if a nameless Montolieu could doubt for a moment her own delight at being created Marchioness of Goodwood! Such a triumph as *that*—why I wouldn't credit *any* woman who pretended she wasn't dazzled by it!"

"I thought you did not approve of marriages of convenience?"

Lady Marabout played a tattoo—slightly perplexed tattoo—with her spoon in her Sèvres saucer.

"No more I do, my dear—that is, under some circumstances; it is impossible to lay down a fixed rule for everything! Marriages of convenience—well, perhaps not; but as *I* understand these words, they mean a mere business affair, arranged as they are in France, without the slightest regard to the inclinations of either; merely regarding whether the incidents of fortune, birth, and station are equal and suitable. Marriages *de convenance* are when a parvenu barters his gold for good blood, or where an *ancienne princesse* mends her fortune with a *nouveau riche*, profound indifference, meanwhile, on each side. I do not call this so; decidedly not! Goodwood must be very deeply attached to you to have forgotten his detestation of marriage, and laid such a title as his at your feet. Have you any idea of the weight of the Dukes of Doncaster in the country? Have you any notion of what their rent-roll is? Have you any conception of their enormous influence, their very high place, the magnificence of their seats? Helmsley almost equals Windsor! All these are yours if you will; and you affect to hesitate—"

"To let Lord Goodwood buy me."

"Buy you? Your phraseology is as strange as my son's!"

"To accept him only for his coronet and the rent-roll, his position and his Helmsley, seems not a very grateful and flattering return for his preference?"

"I do not see that at all," said Lady Marabout, irritably. Is there anything more annoying than to have unwelcome truths thrust in our teeth? "It is not as though he were obvious to you—a hideous man, a coarse man, a cruel man, whose very presence repelled you. Goodwood is a man quite attractive enough to merit some regard, independent of his position, you have an affectionate nature, you would soon grow attached to him——"

Flora Montolieu shook her head.

"And, in fact," she went on, warming with her subject, and speaking all the more determinedly because she was speaking a little against her conscience, and wholly for her inclinations, "my dear Flora, if you need persuasion—which you must pardon me if I doubt your doing in your heart, for I cannot credit any woman as being insensible to the suit of a future Duke of Doncaster, or invulnerable to the honour it does her—if you need persuasion, I should think I need only refer to the happiness it will afford your poor dear mother, amidst her many trials, to hear of so brilliant a triumph for you. You are proud—Goodwood will place you in a position where pride may be indulged with impunity, nay, with advantage. You are ambitious—what can flatter your ambition more than such an offer? You are clever—as Goodwood's wife you may lead society like Madame de Rambouillet, or immerse yourself in political intrigue like the Duchess of Devonshire. It is an offer which places within your reach everything most dazzling and attractive, and it is one, my dear Flora, which you must forgive me if I say a young girl of obscure rank, as rank goes, and no fortune whatever, should pause before she lightly rejects. You cannot afford to be fastidious as if you were an heiress or a lady-in-your-own-right."

That was as ill-natured a thing as the best-natured lady in Christendom ever said on the spur of self-interest, and it stung Flora Montolieu more than her hostess dreamed.

The colour flushed into her face and her eyes flashed:

"You have said sufficient, Lady Marabout. I accept the Marquis to-morrow."

And taking up her fan and her opera-cloak, leaving the discarded roses unheeded on the floor, she bade her chaperone good night, and floated out of the dressing-room, while Lady Marabout sat stirring the cream in a second cup of coffee, a good deal puzzled, a little awed by the odd turn affairs had taken, with a slight feeling of guilt for her own share in the transaction, an uncomfortable dread lest the day should ever come when Flora should reproach her for having persuaded her into the marriage, a comfortable conviction that nothing but good *could* come of such a brilliant and enviable alliance, and, above all other conflicting feelings, one delicious, dominant, glorified security of triumph over the Hauttons, *mère et filles.*

But when morning dawned, Lady Marabout's horizon seemed cleared of all clouds, and only radiant with unshadowed sunshine. Goodwood was coming, and coming to be accepted.

She seemed already to read the newspaper paragraphs announcing his capture and Flora's conquest, already to hear the

Hauttons' enforced congratulations, already to see the nuptial party gathered round the altar-rail of St. George's. Lady Marabout had never felt in a sunnier, more light-hearted mood, never more completely at peace with herself and all the world as she sat in her boudoir at her writing-table, penning a letter which began:

"MY DEAREST LILLA,—What happiness it gives me to congratulate you on the brilliant future opening to your sweet Flora——"

And which would have continued, no doubt, with similar eloquence if it had not been interrupted by Soames opening the door and announcing "Sir Philip Carruthers," who walked in, touched his mother's brow with his moustaches, and went to stand on the hearth with his arm on the mantelpiece.

"My dear Philip, you never congratulated me last night; pray do so now!" cried Lady Marabout, delightedly, wiping her pen on the pennon, which a small ormolu knight obligingly carried for that useful purpose. Ladies always wipe their pens as religiously as they bolt their bedroom doors, believe in cosmetics, and go to church on a Sunday.

"Was your news of last night true, then?" asked Carruthers, bending forward to roll Bijou on its back with his foot.

"That Goodwood had spoken definitively to her? Perfectly. He proposed to her yesterday at the Frangipane concert—not *at* the concert of course, but afterwards, when they were alone for a moment in the conservatories. The Duchess interrupted them—did it on purpose—and he had only time to whisper hurriedly he should come this morning to hear his fate. I dare say he felt tolerably secure of it. Last night I naturally spoke to Flora about it. Oddly enough, she seemed positively to think at first of rejecting him—*rejecting* him!—only fancy the madness! Between ourselves, I don't think she cares anything about him, but with such an alliance as that, of course I felt it my bounden duty to counsel her as strongly as I could to accept the unequalled position it proffered her. Indeed, it could have been only a girl's waywardness, a child's caprice to pretend to hesitate, for she *is* very ambitious and very clever, and I would never believe that any woman—and she less than any—would be proof against such dazzling prospects. It would be absurd, you know, Philip. Whether it was hypocrisy or a real reluctance, because she doesn't feel for him the idealic love she dreams of, I don't know, but I put it before her in a way that plainly showed her all the brilliance of the proffered position, and before she bade me good night I had vanquished all her scruples, if she had any, and I am able to say——"

"Good God, what have you done?"

"Done?" re-echoed Lady Marabout, vaguely terrified. "Certainly I persuaded her to accept him. She *has* accepted him probably; he is here now! I should have been a strange person indeed to let any young girl in my charge rashly refuse such an offer."

"You induced her to accept him! God forgive you!"

Lady Marabout turned pale as death, and gazed at him with undefinable terror:

"Philip! You do not mean——"

"Great Heavens! have you never seen, mother——"

He leaned his arms on the marble, with his forehead bowed upon them, and Lady Marabout gazed at him still, as a bird at a basilisk.

"Philip, Philip! what have I done? How could I tell?" she murmured, distractedly, tears welling into her eyes. "If I had only known! But how could I dream that child had any fascination for you? How could I fancy——"

"Hush! No, you are in no way to blame. You could not know it. *I* barely knew it till last night," he answered, gently.

"Philip loves her, and *I* have made her marry Goodwood!" thought Lady Marabout, agonised, remorseful, conscience-struck, heart-broken in a thousand ways at once. The climax of her woes was reached, life had no greater bitterness for her left; her son loved, and loved the last woman in England she would have had him love; that woman was given to another, and *she* had been the instrument of wrecking the life to save or serve which she would have laid down her own in glad and instant sacrifice! Lady Marabout bowed her head under a grief, before which the worries so great before, the schemes but so lately so precious, the small triumphs just now so all-absorbing, shrank away into their due insignificance. Philip suffering, and suffering through her! Self glided far away from Lady Marabout's memory then, and she hated herself, more fiercely than the gentle-hearted soul had ever hated any foe, for her own criminal share in bringing this unforeseen terrific blow on her beloved one's head.

"Philip, my dearest, what *can* I do?" she cried, distractedly! "if I had thought—if I had guessed——"

"Do nothing. A woman who could give herself to a man whom she did not love should be no wife of mine, let me suffer what I might."

"But *I* persuaded her, Philip! Mine is the blame!"

His lips quivered painfully:

"Had she cared for me as—I may have fancied, she had not been so easy to persuade. She has not much force of character, where she wills. He is here now you say; I cannot risk meeting him just yet. Leave me for a little while; leave me—I am best alone."

Gentle though he always was to her, his mother knew him too well ever to dispute his will, and the most bitter tears Lady Marabout had ever known, ready as she was to weep for other people's woes, and rarely as she had had to weep for any of her own, choked her utterance and blinded her eyes as she obeyed and closed the door on his solitude. Philip—her idolised Philip—that ever her house should have sheltered this creature to bring a curse upon him! that ever she should have brought this tropical flower to poison the air for the only one dear to her.

"I am justly punished," thought Lady Marabout, humbly and penitentially—"justly. I thought wickedly of Anne Hautton. I did not do as I would be done by. I longed to enjoy their mortification. I advised Flora against my own conscience and against hers. I am justly chastised! But that *he* should suffer through me, that my fault has fallen on his head, that my Philip, my noble Philip, should love and not be loved, and that *I* have brought it on him——Good Heaven! what is that?"

"That" was a man whom her eyes being misty with tears, Lady Marabout had brushed against, as she ascended the staircase, ere she perceived him, and who, passing on with a muttered apology, was down in the hall and out of the door Mason held open before she had recovered the shock of the rencontre, much before she had a possibility of recognising him through the mist aforesaid.

A fear, a hope, a joy, a dread, one so woven with another there was no disentangling them, sprang up like a ray of light in Lady Marabout's heart—a possibility dawned in her; to be rejected is an impossibility? Lady Marabout crossed the ante-room, her heart throbbing tumultuously, spurred on to noble atonement and reckless self-sacrifice, if fate allowed them.

She opened the drawing-room door; Flora Montolieu was alone.

"Flora, you have seen Goodwood?"

She turned, her own face as pale and her own eyes as dim as Lady Marabout's.

"Yes."

"You have refused him."

Flora Montolieu misconstrued her chaperone's eagerness, and answered haughtily enough:

"I have told him that indifference would be too poor a return for his affections to insult him with it, and that I would not do him the injury of repaying his trust by falsehood and deception. I meant what I said to you last night; I said it on the spur of pain, indignation, no matter what; but I could not keep my word when the trial came."

Lady Marabout bent down and kissed her, with a fervent gratitude that not a little bewildered the recipient.

"My dear child! thank God! little as I thought to say so. Flora, tell me, you love some one else?"

"Lady Marabout, you have no right——"

"Yes, I have a right—the strongest right! Is not that other my son?"

Flora Montolieu looked up, then dropped her head and burst into tears—tears that Lady Marabout soothed then, tears that Carruthers soothed, yet more effectually still, five minutes afterwards.

"That *I* should have sued that little Montolieu, and sued to her for Philip!" mused Lady Marabout. "It is very odd. Perhaps I get used to being crossed and disappointed and trampled on in every way and by everybody; but certainly, though it is most contrary to my wishes, though a child like that is the last person I should ever have chosen or dreamt of as Philip's wife, though it is a great pain to me, and Anne Hautton of course will be delighted to rake up everything she can about the Montolieus; and it *is* heart-breaking when one thinks how a Carruthers *might* marry, how the Carruthers always *have* married, rarely any but ladies-in-their-own-right for countless generations, still it *is* very odd, but I certainly feel happier than ever I did in my life, annoyed as I am and grieved as I am. It *is* heart-breaking—(that horrid John Montolieu! I wonder what relation one stands in legally to the father of one's son's wife; I will ask Sir Fitzroy Kelly; not that the Montolieus are likely to come to England)—it is very sad when one thinks who Philip might have married; and yet she certainly is infinitely charming, and she really appreciates and understands him. If it were not for what Anne Hautton will always say, I could really be pleased! To think what an anxious hope, what a dreadful ideal, Philip's wife has always been to me; and now, just as I had got reconciled to his determined bachelor preferences, and had grown to agree with him that it was best he shouldn't marry, he goes and falls in love with this child! Everything is at cross-purposes in life, I think! There is only one thing I am resolved upon—I will NEVER chaperone anybody again."

And she kept her vow. None can christen her Lady Tattersall any longer with point, for there are no yearling sales in that house in Lowndes-square, whatever there be in the other domiciles of that fashionable quarter. Lady Marabout has shaken that burden off her shoulders, and moves in blissful solitude and tripled serenity through Belgravia, relieved of responsibility, and wearing her years as lightly, losing the odd trick at her whist as sunnily, and beaming on the world in general as radiantly as any dowager in the English Peerage.

That she was fully reconciled to Carruthers' change of resolve was shown in the fact that when Anne Hautton turned to her, on the evening of his marriage-day, after the dinner to which Lady Marabout had bidden all her friends, and a good many of her foes, with an amiable murmur:

" I am *so* grieved for you, dearest Helena—I know what your disappointment must be!—what should *I* feel if Hautton ——Your *belle-fille* is charming, certainly, very lovely; but then—such a connexion! You have my deepest sympathies! I always told you how wrong you were when you fancied Goodwood admired little Montolieu—I beg her pardon, I mean Lady Carruthers—but you *will* give your imagination such reins!"

Lady Marabout smiled, calmly and amusedly, felt no pang, and—thought of Philip.

I take it things must be very rose-coloured with us when we can smile sincerely on our enemies, and defeat their stings simply because we feel them not.

A STUDY À LA LOUIS QUINZE;

OR,

PENDANT TO A PASTEL BY LA TOUR.

I HAVE, among others hanging on my wall, a pastel of La Tour's; of the artist-lover of Julie Fel, of the monarch of pastellistes, the touch of whose crayons was a "brevet of wit and of beauty," and on whose easel bloomed afresh the laughing eyes, the brilliant tints, the rose-hued lips of all the loveliest women of the "Règne Galant," from the princesses of the Blood of the House of Bourbon to the princesses of the green-room of the Comédie-Française. Painted in the days of Louis Quinze, the light of more than a century having fallen on its soft colours to fade and blot them with the icy brush of time, my pastel is still fresh, still eloquent. The genius that created it is gone—gone the beauty that inspired it—but the picture is deathless! It shows me the face of a woman, of a beautiful woman, else, be sure she would not have been honoured by the crayons of La Tour; her full southern lips are parted with a smile of triumph; a chef-d'œuvre of coquetry, a head-dress of lace and pearls and little bouquets of roses is on her unpowdered hair, which is arranged much like Julie Fel's herself in the portrait that hangs, if I remember right, at the Musée de Saint Quentin; and her large eyes are glancing at you with languor, malice, victory, all commingled. At the back of the picture is written "Mlle. Thargélie Dumarsais;" the letters are faded and yellow, but the pastel is living and laughing yet, through the divine touch of the genius of La Tour. With its perfume of dead glories, with its odour of the Beau Siècle, the pastel hangs on my wall, living relic of a buried age, and sometimes in my mournful moments the full laughing lips of my pastel will part, and breathe, and speak to me of the distant past, when Thargélie Dumarsais saw all Paris at her feet, and was not humbled then as now by being only valued and remembered for the sake of the talent of La Tour. My beautiful pastel gives me many confidences. I will betray one to you—a single leaf from a life of the eighteenth century.

I.

THE FIRST MORNING.

In the heart of Lorraine, nestled down among its woods, stood an old château that might have been the château of the Sleeping Beauty of fairy fame, so sequestered it stood amidst its trees chained together by fragrant fetters of honeysuckle and wild vine, so undisturbed slept the morning shadows on the wild thyme that covered the turf, so unbroken was the silence in which the leaves barely stirred, and the birds folded their wings and hushed their song till the heat of the noonday should be passed. Beyond the purple hills stretching up in the soft haze of distance in the same province of laughing, luxurious, sunlit Lorraine, was Lunéville, the Lunéville of Stanislaus, of Montesquieu, of Voltaire, of Hénault, of Boufflers, a Versailles in miniature, even possessing a perfect replica of Pompadour in its own pretty pagan of a Marquise. Within a few leagues was Lunéville, but the echo of its mots and madrigals did not reach over the hills, did not profane the sunny air, did not mingle with the vintage-song of the vine-dressers, the silver babble of the woodland brook, the hushed chant of the Ave Maria, the vesper bells chimed from the churches and monasteries, which made the sole music known or heard in this little valley of Lorraine.

The château of Grand Charmille stood nestled in its woods, grey, lonely, still, silent as death, yet not gloomy, for white pigeons circled above its pointed towers, brilliant dragon-flies fluttered above the broken basin of the fountain that sang as gaily as it rippled among the thyme as though it fell into a marble cup, and bees hummed their busy happy buzz among the jessamine that clung to its ivy-covered walls—walls built long before Lorraine had ceased to be a kingdom and a power, long before a craven and effeminated Valois had dared to kick the dead body of a slaughtered Guise. Not gloomy with the golden light of a summer noon playing amidst the tangled boughs and on the silvered lichens; not gloomy, for under the elm-boughs on the broken stone steps that led to the fountain, her feet half buried in violet-roots and wild thyme, leaning her head on her hand as she looked into the water, where the birds flew down to drink, and fluttered their wings fearless of her presence, was a young girl of sixteen—and if women sometimes darken lives, it must be allowed that they always illumine landscapes!

Aline, when Boufflers saw her in the spring morning, in all the grace of youth and beauty, unconscious of themselves, made not a prettier picture than this young dreamer under the elm-boughs of the Lorraine woods, as she bent over the water, watching it bubble and splash from the fountain-spout, and hide itself with a rippling murmur under the broad green reeds and the leaves of the water-lily. She was a charming picture: a brunette with long ebon tresses, with her lashes drooping over her black, languid, almond-shaped eyes, a smile on her half-pouted lips, and all the innocence and dawning beauty of her sixteen years about her, while she sat on the broken steps, now brushing the water-drops off the violets, now weaving the reeds into a pretty, useless toy, now beckoning the birds that came to peck on the rose-sprays beside her.

"Favette! where are your dreams?"

Favette, the young naïad of the Lorraine elm-woods, looked up, the plait of rushes dropping from her hands, and a warm sudden blush tinging her cheeks and brow with a tint like that on the damask rose leaves that had fallen into the water, and floated there like delicate shells.

"Mon Dieu, Monsieur Léon, how you frightened me!"

And like a startled fawn, or a young bird glancing round at a rustle amidst the leaves, Favette sprang up, half shy, half smiling, all her treasures gathered from the woods—of flowers, of mosses, of berries, of feathery grasses, long ivy-sprays—falling from her lap on to the turf in unheeded disorder.

"*I* frightened you, Favette! Surely not. Are you sorry to see me, then?"

"Sorry? Oh no, Monsieur Léon!" and Favette glanced through her thick curled lashes, slyly yet archly, and began to braid again her plait of rushes.

"Come, tell me, then, what and whom you were dreaming of, ma mie, as you looked down into the water? Tell me, Favette. You have no secrets from your playmate, your friend, your brother?"

Favette shook her head, smiling, and plaited her rushes *à tort et à travers,* the blush on her cheeks as bright as that on the cups of the rose-leaves that the wind shook down in a fresh shower into the brook.

"Come, tell me, mignonne. Was it—of me?"

"Of you? Well, perhaps—yes!"

It was first love that whispered in Favette's pretty voice those three little words; it was first love that answered in his, as he threw himself down on the violet-tufted turf at her feet, as Boufflers at Aline's.

"Ah, Favette, so should it be! for every hope, every dream, every thought of *mine,* is centred in and coloured by you."

"Yet you can leave me to-day," pouted Favette, with a sigh and a *moue mutine,* and gathering tears in her large gazelle eyes.

"Leave you? Would to Heaven I were not forced! But against a king's will what power has a subject? None are too great, none are too lowly, to be touched by that iron hand if they provoke its grasp. Vincennes yawns for those who dare to think, For-l'Evêque for those who dare to jest. Monsieur de Voltaire was sent to the Bastille for merely defending the truth and his own honour against De Rohan-Chabot. Who am I, that I should look for better grace?"

Favette struck him with her plaited rushes, a reproachful little blow.

"Monsieur Vincennes—Monsieur Voltaire—who are they? I know nothing of those stupid people!"

He smiled, and fondly stroked her hair.

"Little darling! The one is a prison that manacles the deadly crimes of Free Speech and Free Thought; the other a man who has suffered for both, but loves both still, and will, sooner or later, help to give both to the world——"

"Ah, you think of your studies, of your ambitions, of your great heroes! You think nothing of me, save to call me a little darling. You are cruel, Monsieur Léon!"

And Favette twisted her hand from his grasp with petulant sorrow, and dashed away her tears—the tears of sixteen—as bright and free from bitterness as the water drops on the violet bells.

"*I* cruel—and to you! My heart must indeed be badly echoed by my lips, if you have cause to fancy so a single moment. Cruel to you? Favette, Favette! is a man ever cruel to the dearest thing in his life, the dearest name in his thoughts? If I smiled I meant no sneer; I love you as you are, mignonne; the picture is so fair, one touch added, or one touch effaced, would mar the whole in *my* eyes. I love you as you are! with no knowledge but what the good sisters teach you in their convent solitude, and what the songs of the birds, the voices of the flowers, whisper to you of their woodland lore. I love you as you are! Every morning when I am far away from you, and from Lorraine, I shall think of you gathering the summer roses, calling the birds about you, bending over the fountain to see it mirror your own beauty; every evening I shall think of you leaning from the window, chanting softly to yourself the Ora pro nobis, while the shadows deepen, and the stars we have so often watched together come out above the pine-hills. Favette, Favette! exile will have the bitterness of death to me: to give me strength to bear it, tell me that you love me more dearly than as the brother you have always called me; that you will so love me when I shall be no longer here beside you, but shall have to trust to memory and fidelity to guard for me in absence the priceless treasure of your heart?"

Favette's head drooped, and her hands played nervously with the now torn and twisted braid of rushes: he saw her heart beat under its muslin corsage, like a bee caught and caged in the white leaves of a lily; and she glanced at him under her lashes with a touch of naïve coquetry.

"If I tell you so, what gage have I, Monsieur Léon, that a few months gone by, you will even remember it? In those magnificent cities you will soon forget Lorraine; with the *grandes dames* of the courts you will soon cease to care for Favette?"

"Look in my eyes, Favette, they alone can answer you as I would answer! Till we meet again none shall supplant you for an hour, none rob you of one thought; you have my first love, you will have my last. Favette, you believe me?"

"Yes—I believe!" murmured Favette, resting her large eyes fondly on him. "We will meet as we part, though you are the swallow, free to take flight over the seas to foreign lands, and I am the violet, that must stay where it is rooted in the Lorraine woods!"

"Accept the augury," he whispered, resting his lips upon her low smooth brow. "Does not the swallow ever return to the violet, holding it fairer than all the gaudy tropical flowers that may have tempted him to rest on the wing and delay his homeward flight? Does not the violet ever welcome him the same, in its timid winning spring-tide loveliness, when he returns to, as when he quitted, the only home he loves? Believe the augury, Favette; we shall meet as we part!"

And they believed the augury, as they believed in life, in love, in faith; they who were beginning all, and had proved none of the treacherous triad!

What had he dreamed of in his solitary ancestral woods fairer than this Lorraine violet, that had grown up with him, side by side, since he, a boy of twelve, gathered heaths from the clefts of the rocks that the little child of six years old cried for and could not reach? What had she seen that she loved half so well as M. le Chevalier from the Castle, whom her uncle, the Curé, held as his dearest and most brilliant pupil, whose eyes always looked so lovingly into hers, and whose voice was always lavishing fond names on his petite Favette?

They believed the augury, and were happy even in the sweet sorrow of parting—sorrow that they had never known before—as they sat together in the morning sunlight, while the water bubbled among the violet tufts, among the grasses and wild thyme, and the dragon-flies fluttered their green and gold and purple wings amidst the tendrils of the vines, and the rose-leaves, drifted gently by the wind, floated down the brook, till they were lost in deepening shadow under the drooping boughs.

II.

THE SECOND MORNING.

"Savez-vous que Favart va écrire une nouvelle comédie—La Chercheuse d'Esprit?"

"Vraiment? Il doit bien écrire cela, car il s'occupe toujours à la *chercher*, et n'arrive jamais à le trouver!"

The mot had true feminine malice, but the lips that spoke it were so handsome, that had even poor Favart himself, the poet-pastrycook who composed operas and comedies while he made méringues and fanfreluches, and dreamed of libretti while he whisked the cream for a supper, been within hearing, they would have taken the smart from the sting; and, as it was, the hit only caused echoes of softly-tuned laughter, for the slightest words of those lips it was the fashion through Paris just then to bow to, applaud, and re-echo.

Before her Psyche, shrouded in cobweb lace, powdered by Martini, gleaming with pearls and emeralds, scented with most delicate amber, making her morning toilette, and receiving her morning levee according to the fashion of the day, sat the brilliant satirist of poor Favart. The *ruelle* was crowded; three marshals, De Richelieu, Lowendal, and Maurice de Saxe; a prince, De Soubise; a poet, Claude Dorat; an abbé, Voisenon; a centenarian, Saint-Aulaire; peers uncounted, De Bièvre, De Caylus, De Villars, D'Etissac, Duras, D'Argenson—a crowd of others—surrounded and superintended her toilette, in a glittering troop of courtiers and gentlemen. Dames d'atours (for she had her maids of honour as well as Marie Leczinska) handed her flacons of perfume, or her numberless notes on gold salvers, chased by Réveil; the ermine beneath her feet, humbly sent by the Russian ambassador—far superior to what the Czarina sent to Madame de Mailly—had cost two thousand louis; her bedroom outshone in luxury any at Versailles, Choisy, or La Muette, with its Venetian glass, its medallions of Fragonard, its plaques of Sèvres, its landscapes of Watteau, framed in the carved and gilded wainscotting; its Chinese lamps, swinging by garlands of roses; its laughing Cupids, buried under flowers, painted in fresco above the alcove; its hangings of velvet, of silk, of lace; its cabinets, its screens, its bonbonnières, its jewel-boxes, were costly as those of the Marquises de Pompadour or De Prie.

Who was she?—a Princess of the Blood, a Duchess of France, a mistress of the King?

Lords of the chamber obeyed her wishes, ministers signed lettres de cachet, at her instance: "*ces messieurs*," la Queue de la Régence, had their rendezvous at her suppers; she had a country villa that eclipsed Trianon; she had fêtes that outshone the fêtes at Versailles; she had a "*droit de chasse*" in one of the royal districts; she had the first place on the easels of Coypel, Lancret, Pater, Vanloo, La Tour; the first place in the butterfly odes of Crébillon le Gai, Claude Dorat, Voisenon.

Who was she?—the Queen of France? No; much more—the Queen of Paris!

She was Thargélie Dumarsais; matchless as Claire Clairon, beautiful as Madeleine Gaussin, resistless as Sophie Arnould, great as Adrienne Lecouvreur. She was a Power in France—for was she not the Empress of the Comédie? If Madame Lenormand d'Etioles ruled the government at Versailles, Mademoiselle Thargélie Dumarsais ruled the world at Paris; and if the King's favourite could sign her enemies, by a smile, to the Bastile, the Court's favourite could sign hers, by a frown, to For-l'Evêque.

The *foyer* was nightly filled while she played in *Zaïre*, or *Polyeucte*, or *Les Foiles Amoureuses*, with a court of princes and poets, marshals and marquises, beaux esprit and abbés galants; and mighty nobles strewed with bouquets the path from her carriage to the coulisses: bouquets that she trod on with nonchalant dignity, as though flowers only bloomed to have the honour of dying under her foot. Louis Quinze smilingly humoured her caprices, content to wait until it was her pleasure to play at his private theatre; dukes, marquises, viscounts, chevaliers, vied who should ruin himself most magnificently and most utterly for her; and lovers the most brilliant and the most flattering, from Richelieu, Rio de Ruelles, to Dorat, poet of boudoir-graces and court-Sapphos, left the titled beauties of Versailles for the self-crowned Empress of the Français. She had all Paris for her clientela, from Versailles to the Caveau; for even the women she deposed, the actors she braved, the journalists she consigned to For-l'Evêque, dared not raise their voice against the idol of the hour. A Queen of France? Bah! Pray what could Maria Leczinska, the pale, dull pietiest, singing canticles in her private chapel, compare for power, for sway, for courtiers, for brilliant sovereignty, for unrivalled triumph, with Thargélie Dumarsais, the Queen of the Theatre?

Ravishingly beautiful looked the matchless actress as she sat before her Psyche, flashing *œillades,* on the brilliant group who made every added aigrette, every additional bouquet of the coiffure, every little *mouche,* every touch to the already perfect toillette, occasion for flattering simile and soft-breathed compliment; ravishingly beautiful, as she laughed at Maurice de Saxe, or made a disdainful *moue* at an impromptu couplet of Dorat's, or gave a blow of her fan to Richelieu, or asked Saint-Aulaire what he thought of Vanloo's portrait of her as *Rodugune;* ravishingly beautiful, with her charms that disdained alike rouge and maréchale powder, and were matchless by force of their own colouring, form, and voluptuous languor, when, her toïlette finished, followed by her glittering crowd, she let Richelieu lead her to his carriage.

There was a review of Guards on the plain at Sablons that morning, a fête afterwards, at which she would be surrounded by the most brilliant staff of an Army of Noblesse, and Richelieu was at that moment the most favoured of her troop of lovers. M. le Duc, as every one knows, never sued at court or coulisse in vain, and the love of Thargélie Dumarsais, though perhaps with a stronger touch of romance in it than was often found in the atmosphere of the foyer, was, like the love of her time and her class, as inconstant and vivacious, now settling here, now lighting there, as any butterfly that fluttered among the limes at Trianon. Did not the jest-loving *parterre* ever salute with gay laughter two lines in a bagatelle comedy of the hour—

Oui l'Amour papillonne, sans entraves, à son gré;
Chargé longtemps de fers, de soie même, il mourrait!—

when spoken by Thargélie Dumarsais—laughter that hailed her as head priestess of her pleasant creed, in a city and a century where the creed was universal?

"Ah! bonjour! You have not seen her before, have you, semi-Englishman? You have found nothing like her in the foggy isles, I wager you fifty louis?" cried one of Thargélie Dumarsais's court, the Marquis de la Thorillière, meeting a friend of his who had arrived in Paris only the day before,

M. le Chevalier de Tallemont des Réaux, as Richelieu's cortége rolled away, and the Marquis crossed to his own carriage.

"Her? Whom? I have not been in Paris for six years, you know. What can I tell of its idols, as I remember of old that they change every hour?"

"True! but, bon Dieu! not to know La Dumarsais! What it must be to have been buried in those benighted Britannic Isles! Did you not see her in Richelieu's carriage?"

"No. I saw a carriage driving off with such an escort and such fracas, that I thought it could belong to nobody less than to Madame Lenormand d'Etioles; but I did not observe it any further. Who is this beauty I ought to have seen?"

"Thargélie Dumarsais, for whom we are all ruining ourselves with the prettiest grace in the world, and for whom you will do the same when you have been once to the Français; that is, if you have the good fortune to attract her eyes and please her fancy, which you may do, for the fogs have agreed with you, Léon!—I should not wonder if you become the fashion, and set the women raving of you as 'leur zer zevalier!'"

"Thanks for the prophecy, but I shall not stay long enough to fulfil it, and steal your myrtle crowns. I leave again to-morrow."

"*Leave?* Sapristi? See what it is to have become half English, and imbibed a taste for spleen and solitude! Have you written another satire, or have you learned such barbarism as to dislike Paris?"

"Neither; but I leave for Lorraine to-morrow. It is five years since I saw my old pine-woods."

"Dame! it is ten years since *I* saw the wilds of Bretagne, and I will take good care it shall be a hundred before I see them again. *Hors de Paris, c'est hors du monde.* Come with me to La Dumarsais's *petit souper* to-night, and you will soon change your mind."

"My good Armand, you have not been an exile, as I have; you little know how I long for the very scent of the leaves, the very smell of the earth at Grand Charmille! But bah! I talk in Hebrew to you. You have been lounging away your days in titled beauties' *petits salons*, making butterfly verses, learning their broidery, their lisp, and their perfumes, talking to their parrots, and using their cosmétiques, till you care for no air but what is musk-scented! But what of this Dumarsais of yours—does she equal Lecouvreur?"

"Eclipses her!—with Paris as with Maurice de Saxe. Thargélie Dumarsais is superb, mon cher—unequalled, unrivalled! We have had nothing like her for beauty, for grace, for talent, nor pardieu! for extravagance! She ruined *me* last year in a couple of months. Richelieu is in favour just now—with what woman is he not? Thargélie is very fond of the Marshals of France! Saxe is fettered to her hand and foot, and the Duchesse de Bouillon hates her as rancorously as she does Adrienne. Come and see her play *Phèdre* to-night, and you will renounce Lorraine. I will take you to supper with her afterwards; she will permit any friend of mine entry, and then, generous man that I am, I shall have put you *en chemin* to sun yourself in her smiles and ingratiate yourself in her favour. Don't give me too much credit for the virtue though, for I confess I should like to see Richelieu supplanted."

"Does his reign threaten to last long, then?"

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders, and gave his badine an expressive whisk.

"Dieu sait! we are not prophets in Paris. It would be as easy to say where that weathercock may have veered to-morrow, as to predict where La Dumarsais's love may have lighted ere a month! Where are you going, may I ask?"

"To see Lucille de Vaudreuil. I knew her at Lunéville; she and Madame de Boufflers were warm friends till Stanislaus, I believe, found Lucille's eyes lovelier than Madame la Marquise deemed fit, and then they quarrelled, as women ever do, with virulence in exact proportion to the ardour of their friendship."

"As the women quarrel at Choisy for *notre maître!* They will be friends again when both have lost the game, like Louis de Mailly and the Duchesse de Châteauroux. The poor Duchess! Fitz-James and Maurepas, Châtillon and Bouillon, Rochefoucauld and the Père Pérussot, all together, were too strong for her. All the gossip of that Metz affair reached you across the water, I suppose! Those pests of Jesuits! if they want him to be their Very Christian King, and to cure him of his worship of Cupidon, they will have to pull down all the stones of La Muette and the Parc aux Cerfs! What good is it to kill *one* poor woman when women are as plentiful as roses at Versailles? And now let me drive you to Madame de Vaudreuil; if *she* do not convert you from your fancy for Lorraine this morning, Thargéle Dumarsais will to-night."

"*Mon zer zevalier, Paris est adorable! Vous n'êtes pas sé'ieux en voulant le quitter, z'en suis sûre!*" cried the Comtesse de Vaudreuil, in the pretty lisp of the day, a charming little blonde, patched and powdered, nestled in a chair before a fire of perfumed wood, teasing her monkey Zulmé with a fan of Pater's, and giving a pretty little sign of contempt and disbelief with some sprays of jessamine employed in the chastisement of offenders more responsible and quite as audacious as Zulmé.

Her companion, her "zer zevalier," was a young man of seven-and-twenty, with a countenance frank, engaging, nobly cast, far more serious, far more thoughtful in its expression, than was often seen in that laughing and mocking age. Exiled when a mere boy for a satirical pamphlet which had provoked the wrath of the Censeur Royal, and might have cost him the Bastille but for intercession from Lunéville, he had passed his youth less in pleasure than in those philosophical and political problems then beginning to agitate a few minds; which were developed later on in the "Encyclopédia," later still in the Assemblée Nationale. Voltaire and Helvetius had spoken well of him at Madame de Geoffrin's; Claudine de Tencin had introduced him the night before in her brilliant salons; the veteran Fontenelle had said to him; "*Monsieur, comme censeur royal je refusai mon approbation à votre brochure; comme homme libre je vous en félicite*"—all that circle was prepared to receive him well, the young Chevalier de Tallemont might make a felicitous season in Paris if he chose, with the romance of his exile about him, and Madame de Vaudreuil smiling kindly on him.

"The country!" she cried; "the country is all very charming in eclogues and pastorals, but out of them it is a desert of ennui! What *can* you mean, Léon, by leaving Paris to-morrow? Ah, méchant, there must be something we do not see, some love besides that of the Lorraine woods!"

"Madame, is there not my father?"

"*Bien zoli!* But at your age men are not so filial. There is some other reason—but what? Any love you had there five years ago has hardly any attractions now. Five years! Ma foi, five months is an eternity that kills the warmest passion!"

"May there not be some love, madame, that time only strengthens?"

"I never heard of it if there be. It would be a very dreary affair, I should fancy, smouldering, smouldering on and on like an ill-lit fire. Nobody would thank you for it, mon cher, *here!* Come, what is your secret? Tell it me."

Léon de Tallemont smiled; the smile of a man who has happy thoughts, and is indifferent to ridicule.

"Madame, one can refuse you nothing! My secret? It is a very simple one. The greatest pang of my enforced exile was the parting from one I loved; the greatest joy of my return is that I return to her."

"*Bon Dieu! comme c'est drôle!* Here is a man talking to me of love, and of a love not felt for *me!*" thought Madame la Comtesse, giving him a soft glance of her beautiful blue eyes. "You are a very strange man. You have lived out of France till you have grown wretchedly serious and eccentric. Loved this woman for five years? Leon! Léon! you are telling me a fairy tale. Who is she, this enchantress? She must have some mysterious magic. Tell me—quick!"

"She is no enchantress, madame, and she has no magic save the simple one of having ever been very dear to me. We grew up together at Grande Charmille; she was the orphan niece of the Priest, a fond, innocent, laughing child, fresh and fair, and as untouched by a breath of impure air as any of the violets in the valley. She was scarcely out of the years of childhood when I left her, with beauty whose sweetest grace of all was its own unconsciousness. Through my five long years of exile I have remembered Favette as I saw her last under the elm-boughs in the summer light, her eyes dim with the tears of our parting, her young heart heaving with its first grief. I have loved her too well for others to have power to efface or to supplant her; of her only have I thought, of her only have I dreamed, holding her but the dearer as the years grew further from the hour of our separation, nearer to the hour of our reunion. I have heard no word of her since we parted; but of what value is love without trust and fidelity in trial? The beauty of her childhood may have merged into the beauty of womanhood, but I fear no other change in Favette. As we parted so we vowed to meet, and I believe in her love as in my own. I know that I shall find my Lorraine violet, without stain or soil. Madame, Favette is still dearer to me now, Heaven help me, than five years ago. Five years—five years—true! it *is* an eternity! Yet the bitterness of the past has faded for ever from me *now*, and I only see—the future!"

Madame de Vaudreuil listened in silence; his words stirred in her chords long untouched, never heard amidst the mots, the madrigals, the laughter of her world of Paris, Versailles, and Choisy. She struck him a little blow with her jessamine-sprays, with a mist gathering over her lovely blue eyes.

"Hush, hush, Léon! you speak in a tongue unknown here. A word of the heart amongst us sounds a word of a *Gaulois* out of fashion—forbidden."

III.

MIDNIGHT.

The Français was crowded. Thargélie Dumarsais, great in *Electre, Chimène, Inès*, as in "*Ninette à la Cour*," "*Les Moissonneurs*," or "*Annette et Lubin*," was playing in "*Phèdre*." Louis Quinze was present, with all the powdered marquises, the titled wits, the glittering gentlemen of the Court of Versailles; but no presence stayed the shout of adoration with which the parterre welcomed the idol of the hour, and Louis le Bien-aimé (des femmes!) himself added his royal quota to the ovation, and threw at her feet a diamond, superb as any in his regalia. It was whispered that the Most Christian King was growing envious of his favourite's favour with La Dumarsais, and would, ere long, supersede him.

The foyer was filled with princes of the blood, marshals of France, dukes, marquises, the elite of her troop of lovers; lords and gentlemen crowded the passages, flinging their bouquets for her carpet as she passed; and poor scholars, young poets, youths without a sou—amongst them Diderot, Gilbert, Jean-Jacques Rousseau—pressed forward to catch a glimpse, by the light of the links, of this beauty, on which only the eyes of grands seigneurs who could dress Cupidon in a court habit *parfilé d'or* were allowed to gaze closely, as she left the Français, after her unmatched and uninterrupted triumphs, and went to her carriage with Richelieu. The suppers of Thargélie Dumarsais were renowned through Paris; they equalled in magnificence the suppers of the Regency, rivalled them for licence, and surpassed them for wit. All the world might flock to her fêtes, where she undisguisedly sought to surpass the lavishness of Versailles, even by having showers of silver flung from her windows to the people in the streets below; but to her *soupers à huis clos* only a chosen few were admitted, and men would speak of having supped with La Dumarsais as boastfully as women of having supped with the King at Choisy.

"What you have lost in not seeing her play *Phèdre!* Helvetius would have excused you; all the talk of his salons is not worth one glance at La Dumarsais. Mon ami! you will be converted to Paris when once you have seen her," said the Marquis de la Thorillière, as his carriage stopped in the Chaussée d'Antin.

Léon de Tallemont laughed, and thought of the eyes that would brighten at his glance, and the heart that would beat against his own once more under the vine shadows of Lorraine. No new magic, however seductive, should have strength to shake his allegiance to that Memory: and true to his violet in Lorraine, he defied the Queen of the Foyer.

"We are late, but that is always a more pardonable fault than to be too early," said the Marquis as they were ushered across the vestibule, through several salons, into the supper-room, hung with rich tapestries of "Les Nymphes au Bain," "Diane Chasseresse," and "Apollon et Daphné;" with gilded consoles, and rosewood buffets, enamelled with medallion groups, and crowded with Sèvres and porcelaine de Saxe, while Venetian mirrors at each end of the salle reflected the table, with its wines and fruits, and flowers, its gold dishes and Bohemian glass. The air was heavily perfumed, and vibrating with laughter. The guests were Richelieu, Bièvre, Saxe, D'Etissac, Montcrif, and lovely Marie Camargo, the queen of the coulisses who introduced the "short skirts" of the ballet, and upheld her innovation so staunchly amidst the outcries of scandalised Jansenists and journalists. But even Marie Camargo herself paled—and would have paled even had she been, what she was not, in the first flush of her youth—before the superb beauty, the languid voluptuousness, the sensuous grace, the southern eyes, the full lips, like the open leaves of a damask rose, melting yet mocking, of the most beautiful and most notorious woman of a day in which beauty and notoriety were rife, the woman with the diamond of Louis Quinze sparkling in the light upon her bosom, whom Versailles and Paris hailed as Thargélie Dumarsais.

The air, scented with amber, rang with the gay echoes of a stanza of Dorat's, chanted by Marie Camargo; the "Cupids and Bacchantes," painted in the panels of Sèvres, seemed to laugh in sympathy with the revel over which they presided: the light flashed on the King's diamond, to which Richelieu pointed, with a wicked whisper; for the Marshal was getting tired of his own reign, and his master might pay his court when he would. Thargélie Dumarsais, more beautiful still at her *petit souper* than at her *petit lever*, with her hair crowned with roses, true flowers of Venus that might have crowned Aspasia, looked up laughingly as her lacqueys ushered in le Marquis de la Thorillière and Le Chevalier de Tallemont.

"M. le Marquis," cried the actress, "you are late! It is an impertinence forbidden at my court. I shall sup in future with barred doors, like M. d'Orléans; then all you late-comers——"

Through the scented air, through the echoing laughter, stopping her own words, broke a startled bitter cry:

"*Mon Dieu, c'est Favette!*"

Thargélie Dumarsais shrank back in her rose velvet fauteuil as though the blow of a dagger had struck her; the colour fled from her lips, and underneath the delicate rouge on her cheeks; her hand trembled as it grasped the king's aigrette.

"Favette—Favette! Who calls me that?"

It was a forgotten name, the name of a bygone life, that fell on her ear with a strange familiar chime, breaking in on the wit, the licence, the laughter of her midnight supper, as the subdued and mournful sound of vesper bells might fall upon the wild refrains and noisy drinking-songs of bacchanalian melody.

A surprised silence fell upon the group, the laughter hushed, the voices stopped; it was a strange interruption for a midnight supper. Thargélie Dumarsais involuntarily rose, her lips white, her eyes fixed, her hand clasped convulsively on the King's diamond. A vague, speechless terror held mastery over her, an awe she could not shake off had fastened upon her, as though the dead had risen from their graves, and come thither to rebuke her for the past forgotten, the innocence lost. The roses in her hair, the flowers of revel, touched a cheek blanched as though she beheld some unearthly thing, and the hand that lay on the royal jewel shook and trembled.

"Favette? Favette?" she echoed again. "It is so many years since I heard that name!"

Her guests sat silent still, comprehending nothing of this single name which had such power to move and startle her. Richelieu alone, leaning back in his chair, leisurely picked out one of his brandy-cherries, and waited as a man waits for the next scene at a theatre:

"Is it an unexpected tragedy, or an arranged comedy, ma chère? Ought one to cry or to laugh? Give me the *mot d'ordre!*"

His words broke the spell, and called Thargélie Dumarsais back to the world about her. Actress by profession and by nature, she rallied with a laugh, putting out her jewelled hand with a languid glance from her long almond-shaped eyes.

"A friend of early years, my dear Duc, that is all. Ah, Monsieur de Tallemont, what a strange rencontre! When did you come to Paris? I scarcely knew you at the first moment: you have so long been an exile, one may pardonably be startled by your apparition, and take you for a ghost! I suppose you never dreamed of meeting Favette Fontanie under my *nom de theâtre?* Ah! how we change, do we not, Léon? Time is so short, we have no time to stand still! Marie, ma chère, give Monsieur le Chevalier a seat beside you—he cannot be happier placed!"

Léon de Tallemont heard not a word that she spoke; he stood like a man stunned and paralysed by a sudden and violent blow, his head bowed, a mortal pallor changing his face to the hues of death, the features that were a moment before bright, laughing, and careless, now set in mute and rigid anguish.

"Favette! Favette!" he murmured, hoarsely, in the vague dreamy agony with which a man calls wildly and futilely on the beloved dead to come back to him from the silence and horror of the grave.

"Peste!" laughed Richelieu. "This cast-off lover seems a strange fellow! Does he not know that absent people have never the presumption to dream of keeping their places, but learn to give them graciously up!—shall I teach him the lesson? If he have his sixteen quarterings, a prick of my sword will soon punish his impudence!"

The jeer fell unheeded on Léon de Tallemont's ear; had he heard it, the flippant sneer would have had no power to sting him then. Regardless of the men around the supper-table, he grasped Thargélie Dumarsais's hands in his:

"This is how we meet!"

She shrank away from his glance, terrified, she scarce knew why, at the mute anguish upon his face.

Perhaps for a moment she realised how utterly she had abused the love and wrecked the life of this man; perhaps with his voice came back to her thronging thoughts of guileless days, memories ringing through the haze of years, as distant chimes ring over the water from lands we have quitted, reaching us when we have floated far away out to sea—memories of an innocent and untroubled life, when she had watched the woodland flowers open to the morning sun, and listened to the song of the brooks murmuring over the violet roots, and heard the sweet evening song of the birds rise to heaven under the deep vine shadows of Lorraine.

One moment she was silent, her eyes falling, troubled and guilty, beneath his gaze; then she looked up, laughing gaily, and flashing on him her languid, lustrous glance.

"You look like a somnambulist, *mon ami!* Did nobody ever tell you, then, how Mme. de la Vrillière carried me off from Lorraine, and brought me in her train to Paris, till, when Favette Fontanie was tired of being petted like the spaniel, the monkey, and the parrot, she broke away from Madame la Marquise, and made, after a little probation at the Foire St. Laurent, her appearance at the Français as Thargélie Dumarsais? *Allons donc!* have I lost my beauty, that you look at me thus? You should be reminding me of the proverb, '*On revient toujours à ses premiers amours!*' Surely, Thargélie Dumarsais will be as attractive to teach such a lesson as that little peasant girl, Favette, used to be? Bah, Léon!

Can I not love you as well again in Paris as I once loved you at Grande Charmille! And—who knows?—perhaps I will!"

She leaned towards him—her breath fanning his cheek, her scented hair brushing his lips, her eyes meeting his with eloquent meaning, her lips parted with the resistless witchery of that melting and seductive *sourire d'amour* to which they were so admirably trained. He gazed down on her, breathless, silence-stricken—gazed down on the sorceress beauty to which the innocent loveliness of his Lorraine flower had changed. Was this woman, with the rouge upon her cheeks, the crimson roses in her hair, the mocking light in her eyes, the wicked laugh on her lips, the diamond glittering like a serpent's eye in her bosom—was she the guileless child he had left weeping, on the broken steps of the fountain, tears as pure as the dew in the violet-bells, with the summer sunlight streaming round her, and no shade on her young brow darker than the fleeting shadow flung from above by the fleeting vine-leaves? A cry broke once more from his lips:

"Would to God I had died before to-night!"

Then he lifted his head, with a smile upon his face—a smile that touched and vaguely terrified all those who saw it—the smile of a breaking heart.

"I thank you for your proffered embraces, but *I* am faithful. I love but one, and I have lost her; Favette is dead! I know nothing of Thargélie Dumarsais, the Courtesan."

He bowed low to her and left her—never to see her face again.

A silence fell on those he had quitted, even upon Richelieu; perhaps even he realised that all beauty, faith, and joy were stricken from this man's life; and—reality of feeling was an exile so universally banished from the gay salons of the Dix-huitième Siècle, that its intrusion awed them, as by the unwonted presence of some ghostly visitant.

Thargélie Dumarsais sat silent—her thoughts had flown away once more from her brilliant supper-chamber to the fountain at Grande Charmille; she was seeing the dragon-flies flutter among the elm-boughs, and the water ripple over the wild thyme; she was feeling the old priest's good-night kiss upon her brow, and her own hymn rise and mingle with the chant of the vesper choir; she was hearing the song of the forest birds echo in the Lorraine woods, and a fond voice whisper to her, "Fear not, Favette!—we shall meet as we part!"

Richelieu took up his Dresden saucer of cherries once more with a burst of laughter.

"*Violà un drôle!*—this fellow takes things seriously. What fools there are in this world! It will be a charming little story for Versailles. Dieu! how Louis will laugh when I tell it him! I fear though, ma chère, that the 'friend of your childhood' will make you lose your reputation by his impolitic epithets!"

"When one has nothing, one can lose nothing—eh, ma chère?" laughed Marie Camargo. "Monsieur le Duc, she does not hear us——"

"No, *l'infidèle!*" cried Richelieu. "Mademoiselle! I see plainly you love this rude lover of bygone days better than you do us?—is it not the truth!"

"Chut! nobody asks for truths in a polite age!" laughed Thargélie Dumarsais, shaking off unwelcome memories once for all, and looking down at the King's diamond gleaming in the light—the diamond that prophesied to her the triumph of the King's love.

"Naturally," added La Camargo. "My friend, I shall die with envy of your glorious jewel. *Dieu! comme il brille!*"

"DEADLY DASH."

A STORY TOLD ON THE OFF DAY.

On the off-day after the Derby everybody, except the great winners, is, it will be generally admitted, the resigned prey to a certain gentle sadness, not to say melancholy, that will only dissipate itself under a prolonged regimen of S. and B., Seidlitz well dashed with Amontillado, or certain heavenly West Indian decoctions;—this indisposition, I would suggest, we should call, delicately and dubiously, Epsomitis. It will serve to describe innumerable forms and degrees of the reactionary malady.

There is the severest shape of all, "dead money," that covers four figures, dropped irretrievably, and lost to the "milkers;" lost always *you* say because of a cough, or because of a close finish, or because of a something dark, or because of a strain in the practising gallops, or because of a couple of brutes that cannoned just at the start; and never, of course, because the horse you had fancied was sheerly and simply only fit for a plater. There is the second severe form, when you awake with a cheerful expectation of a summons for driving "at twelve miles an hour" (as if that wasn't moderate and discreet!) and for thereby smashing a greengrocer's cart into the middle of next week, and running a waggonette into an omnibus, as you came back from the Downs, of which you have no more remembrance than that there was a crash, and a smash, and a woman's screams, and a man's "d—n the swells!" and a *tintamarre* of roaring conductor and bellowing greengrocer, and infuriated females, through which you dashed somehow with a cheer—more shame for you—and a most inappropriate *l'Africaine* chorus from the men on your drag. There is the milder form, which is only the rueful recollection of seeing, in a wild ecstasy, the chesnut with the white blaze sweep with his superb stride to the front, and of having, in your moment of rapturous gratitude to the red and blue, rushed, unintentionally, during the discussion of Fortnum and Mason's hamper, into a promise to take Euphrosyne Brown to Baden in August, where you know very well she will cost you more than all your sums netted through Gladiateur. There are slenderer touches of the malady, which give you, over your breakfast coffee, a certain dolorous meditation as to how you could have been such a fool as to have placed all your trust in Danebury, or to have put in a hole through Spring Cottage just what your yacht costs for three months; which makes you wonder why on earth you took that lot of actresses on to the hill, and threw money enough away on them in those wages of idiotcy (or wages of sin, as your uncle the dean would translate it), of cashmeres, eau de Cologne, gloves, and bracelets, to have purchased those two weight carriers offered you at 600*l.* the pair, and dirt cheap at that; or which makes you only dully and headachily conscious that you drank champagne up on the box-seat as if you were a young fellow from Eton, and now pay for the juvenile folly, as you know you deserve to do, when that beautiful white Burgundy at your club, or your own cool perfect claret at home, seems to stare you in the face and ask, "Why *did* you crack all those bottles of Dry on the Downs?"

There are symptoms and varieties innumerable of the malady that I propose shall be known henceforward as Epsomitis; therefore, the off-day finds everybody more or less slightly done up and mournful. Twenty-four hours and the Oaks, if properly prepared for by a strictly medicinal course of *brûles-gueules*, as the Chasseurs say, smoked perseveringly, will bring all patients round on the Friday; but during the twenty-four hours a sense that all on and off the course is vanity and vexation of spirit will generally and somnolently predominate in the universal and fashionable disease of Epsomitis.

One off-day, after the magnificent victory of Monarque's unrivalled son, an acquaintance of mine, suffering considerably from these symptoms, sought my philosophy and my prescriptions. A very sharp irritant for Epsomitis may be administered in the form of "I told you so! It's all your own fault!" But this species of blister and douche bath combined is rarely given unless the patient be mad enough to let his wife, if he unluckily have one, learn what ails him. As far as I was concerned, I was much too sympathetic with the sufferer to be down upon him with the triumphant reminder that I had cautioned him all along not to place his trust in Russley. I, instead, prescribed him cool wines, and led him on to talk of other people's misfortunes, the very best way to get reconciled with your own. We talked of old times, of old memories, of old acquaintance, in the twilight, between Derby and Oaks. We got a little melancholy; too much champagne is always productive on the morrow of a gently sentimental tinge, and a man is always inclined to look on the world as a desert when he has the conviction that he himself has been made a fool in it. Among other names, that of Deadly Dash came up between us. What had become of him? I did not know; he did. He told me; and I will tell it here, for the story is of the past now.

"Deadly Dash! what a shot he was! Never missed," said my friend, whose own gun is known well enough at Hornsey-wood House; therewith falling into a reverie, tinged with a Jacques-like gloom of Epsomitis in its severest form, from which he awoke to tell me slowly, between long draughts of iced drinks what I write now. I alter his tale in nothing, save in filling in with words the gaps and blanks that he made, all-eloquent in his halting oratory, by meditative, plaintive, moralising puffs from his tonic, the *brûle-gueule*, and an occasional appeal to my imagination in the customary formula of "Oh, bother!—*you* understand—all the rest of it, you know," which, though it tells everything over claret, is not so clear a mode of relation in type. For all else here the story is as he gave it to me.

"Deadly Dash!" It was a fatal sounding sobriquet, and had a fatal fascination for many, for me as well as the rest, when I was in my salad days and joined the old —th, among whose Light Dragoons it was so signally and ominously famous. The nickname had a wide significance; "*he always kills,*" was said with twofold truth, in twofold meaning of Dash; in a *barrière* duel he would wheel lightly, aim carelessly, and send the ball straight as any arrow through heart or lung, just as he fancied, in the neatest style anybody could dream of; and in an intrigue he took just the same measures, and hit as invariably with the self-same skill and the self-same indifference. "He always kills," applied equally to either kind of affair, and got him his sobriquet, which he received with as laughing an equanimity as a riding man gets the Gilt Vase, or a "lover of the leash" the Ravensworth Stakes, or the Puppy Cup and Goblet. He was proud of it, and had only one regret, that he lived in the dead days of the duel, and could only go out when he was on French soil. In dare-devilry of every sort he out-Heroded Herod, and distanced any who were mad enough to try the pace with him in that steeple-chase commonly called "going to the bad." It was a miracle how often he used to reach the stage of "*complete* ruin" that the Prince de Soubise once sighed for as an unattainable paradise; and picked himself up again, without a hair turned, as one may say, and started off with as fresh a pace as though nothing had knocked him over. Other men had got his speed sometimes; but nobody could ever equal his stay. For an "out and out goer" there was nobody like Deadly Dash; and though only a Captain of Horse, with few "expectations," he did what Dukes daren't have done, and lived at a faster rate than all the elder sons in the kingdom put together. Dash had the best bow and the brightest wits, the lightest morals and the heaviest debts of any *sabreur* in the Service; very unscrupulous fellows were staggered at *his* devil-me-care vices; and as for reputation,—"a deuced pleasant fellow, Dash," they used to say at the Curragh, in the Guards' Club, at Thatched House anniversary dinners, in North Indian cantonments, in Brighton barrack rooms, or in any of the many places where Deadly Dash was a household word; "a very pleasant fellow; no end 'fit' always, best fun in life over the olives when you get him in the humour; shoot you dead though next morning, if he want, and you be handy for him in a neat snug little Bad; make some devil of a *mot* on you too afterwards, just as pleasantly as if he were offering you a Lopez to smoke!"

Now, that was just the sort of celebrity that made me mad to see the owner of it; there wasn't a living being, except that year's favourite out of the Whitewall establishment, that I was half so eager to look at, or so reverent when I thought of, as "the Killer." I was very young then. I had gone through a classic course of yellow covers from Jeffs' and Rolandi's, and I had a vague impression that a man who had had a dozen *barrière* affairs abroad, and been "*enfant*" to every lovely *lionne* of his day, must of necessity be like the heroes of Delphine Demirep's novels, who had each of them a "je ne sais quoi de farouche et de fier dans ses grands yeux noirs, et toute la révélation d'une ame usée, mais dominée par des passions encore inépuisables, écrite sur son sombre et pale visage," &c., &c., in the Demirep's most telling style.

I don't know quite what I expected to see in the Killer, but I think it was a sort of compound of Monte Christo, Mephistopheles, and Murat mixed in one; what I did see was a slight delicate man, with a face as fair and soft as a girl's, the gentlest possible manners, and a laugh like music. Deadly Dash had led a life as bad as he could lead, had lit his cigar without a tremor in the wrist, on many grey mornings, while his adversary lay dying hard among the red rank grasses, had gamed so deep twenty-four hours at a stretch that the most reckless *galérie* in Europe held their breath to watch his play; had had a tongue of silver for his intrigues and a nerve of steel for his *vendetta;* had lived in reckless rioting and drunk deep; but the Demirep would not have had him at any price in her romance; he looked so simple and quietly thorough-bred, he was so utterly guiltless of all her orthodox traits. The gentlest of mortals was Deadly Dash; when you first heard his sweet silvery voice, and his laughter as light and airy as a woman's, you would never believe how often abroad there a dead man had been left to get stiff and cold among the clotted herbage, while the Killer went out of the town by the early express, smoking and reading the "Charivari," and sipping some cold Curaçoa punch out of his flask.

"Of course!" growled a man to me once in the Guards' smoking-room, an order of the Scots Fusiliers to Montreal having turned him misanthrope. "Did Mephistopheles ever come out in full harness, with horns and tail complete, eh? Not such a fool. He looked like a gentleman, and talked like a wit. Would the most dunder-headed Cain in Christendom, I should be glad to know, be such an ass as to go about town with the brand on his forehead, when he could turn down Bond-street any day and get a dash of the ladies' pearl powder? Who ever *shows* anything now, my good fellow? Not that Dash 'paints,' to give the deuce his due—except himself a little blacker even than he is; he don't cant; he couldn't cant; not to save his life, I believe. But as to his bewitching you, almost as bad as he does the women, I know all about that. I used to swear by him till——"

"Till what?"

"Till he cut a brother of mine out with Rachel, and shot him in the woods of Chantilly for flaring-up rough at the rivalry. Charlie was rather a good fellow, and Dash and I didn't speak after that, you see. Great bore; bosh too, perhaps. Dash brews the best Curaçoa punch in Europe, and if he name you the winning mount for the Granby, you may let the talent damn you as they like. Still you know, as he killed Charlie——" and the Guardsman stuck a great cheeroot in his mouth, in doubt as to whether, after all, it wasn't humbug, and an uncalled-for sacrifice, rather than scenic and sentimental, to drop an expert at Curaçoa brew, and a sure prophet for Croxton Park, just because, in a legitimate fashion, he had potted your brother and relieved your entail;—on the whole, a friendly act rather than otherwise? "Keep clear of the Killer, though, young one," he added, as he sauntered out. "He's like that cheetah cub of Berkeley's; soft as silk, you know, *patte de velours*, and what d'ye call 'em, and all the rest of it, but deucedly deadly to deal with."

I did know: it was the eternal refrain that was heard on all sides; from the wily Jews through whose meshes he slipped; the unhappy duns who were done by him; the beauties who were bewitched by him; the hosts and husbands who, having him down for the pheasants, found him poach other preserves than those of the cover sides; the women who had their characters shattered by a silvery sneer from a voice that was as soft, in its murderous slander, as in its equally murderous wooing; and all the rest, who, in some shape or another, owed ruin to that Apollo Apollyon—Deadly Dash. Ruin which at last became so wide and so deep, that even vice began to look virtuous when his name was mentioned (vice always does when she thinks you are really cleared out), and men of his own corps and his own club began to get shy of having the Killer's arm linked in theirs too often down Pall Mall, for its wrist was terribly steady in either Hazard, whether of the yard of green table or the twenty yards of green turf.

At last the crisis came: the Killer killed one too many; a Russian Prince in the Bois de Vincennes, in a quarrel about a pretty wretched little chorus-singer of the Café Alcazar, who took their fancies both at once. The *mondes* thought it terribly wicked, not the deed, you know, but the audacity of a cavalry man's having potted a Very Serene High Mightiness. In a Duke, all these crimes and crimcons, though as scarlet, would have been held but the crimson gold-dotted fruit adorning the strawberry-leaves; Deadly Dash, a Light Dragoon, whose name was signed to plenty of "floating little bills," could not bid high enough to purchase his pardon from Society, which says to its sinners with austere front of virtue, "Oblivion cannot be hired—unless," adds Society, dropping to mellowest murmur her whisper, "unless you can give us a premium!" So Dash, with a certain irresistible though private pressure upon him from the Horse Guards—sent in his papers to sell. What had been done so often could not now be done again; the first steeple-chaser in the Service could not at last even save his stake, but was finally, irretrievably, struck out.

Certainly the fellow was a bad fellow, and deserved his crash, so far; he had no scruples, and no conscience; he spared neither woman nor man; of remorse he had never felt a twinge, and if you were in his path he would pick you off some way or other as indifferently as if you were one of the pigeons at Hornsey. And yet, he had been kind to me, though I was a young one; with his own variable Free Lance sort of liberality, the man would give his last sou to get you out of any difficulty, and would carry off your mistress, or beggar you at chicken-hazard, with the self-same pleasant air the next day: and I could not help being sorry that things had come to this pass with him. He shot so superbly! Put him where you would, in a warm corner while the bouquets of pheasant were told off; in a punt, while a square half-mile of wild ducks whirred up from the marshes; in a dark forest alley in Transylvania, while the great boar rushed down through the twilight, foaming blood and roaring fury; in a still Indian night with the only target here and there a dusky head diving amidst the jhow jungle three hundred yards away: put him where you would, he was such a magnificent shot! The sins of a Frankenstein should not have lost such a marksman as Deadly Dash to the Service.

But the authorities thought otherwise; they were not open to the fact, that the man who had been out in more *barrière* affairs, and had won more Grand Military stakes than any other, should, by all laws of war-policy, have had his blackest transgressions forgiven him, till he could have been turned to account against Ghoorkas, Maories, or Caffres. The authorities instead made him send in his papers, not knowing the grand knack of turning a scamp into a hero—a process that requires some genius and some clairvoyance in the manipulator—and Deadly Dash, with his lightest and airiest laugh, steamed down channel one late autumn night, marked, disgraced, and outlawed, for creditors by the score were after him, knowing very well that he and his old gay lawless life, and his own wild pleasant world, and his old lands yonder in the green heart of the grass countries that had gone rood by rood to the Hebrews, were all divorced for ever, with a great gulf between them that could never close.

So he dropped out of the Service, out of the country, out of remembrance, out of regret; nobody said a De Profundis over him, and some men breathed the freer. We can rarely be sure of any who will be sorry to miss us; but we can always be certain of some to be glad we are gone. And in the Killer's case these last were legion. Here and there were one or two who owed him a wayward, inconstant bizarre fit of generosity; but there were on the other hand hundreds who owed him nothing less than entire ruin.

So Deadly Dash went with nobody to regret him and nobody to think of him for a second, after the nine hours' wonder in the clubs and the mess-rooms that his levanting "under a cloud" occasioned; and so the old sobriquet that had used to have so signal a notoriety, dropped out of men's mouths and was forgotten. Where he was gone no one knew; and, to be sure, no one asked. Metaphorically, he was gone to the devil; and when a man takes that little tour, if he furnish talk for a day he has had very distinguished and lengthened obsequies as friendship goes in this world. Now and then, in the course of half a dozen years, I remembered him, when I looked up at the head of a Royal over my mantelpiece, with thirteen points, that he had stalked once in Ayrshire and given to me; but nobody else gave a thought to the Killer. Time passed, and whether he had been killed fighting in Chili or Bolivia, shot himself at Homburg, become Mussulman and entered the Sultan's army, gone to fight with the Kabyles and Bedouins, turned brigand for the Neapolitan Bourbons, or sunk downward by the old well-worn stage, so sadly and so often travelled, into an adventurer living by the skill of his écarté and the dread surety of his shot, we did not know; we did not care. When Society has given a man the sack, it matters uncommonly little whether he has given himself a shroud.

Seven or eight years after the name of Deadly Dash had ceased to be heard among cavalry men, and quoted on all things "horsey," whether of the flat or of the ridge and furrow, I was in the Confederate States, on leave for a six months' tour there. It was after Lee's raid across the border and the days of Gettysburgh. I had run the blockade in a fast-built clipper, and pushed on at once into the heart of Virginia, to be in the full heat of whatever should come on the cards; cutting the cities rather, and keeping as much as I could to the camps and the woods, for I wanted to see the real thing in the rough. In my relish for adventure, however, I was a trifle, as it proved, too foolhardy.

Starting alone one day to cross the thirty miles or so that parted me from the encampment of some Virginian Horse, with no other companions than a very weedy-looking steel grey and a brace of revolvers, I fairly "lost tracks," and had not a notion of my way out of a wilderness of morass and forest, all glowing with the scarlet and the green of the Indian summer. Here and there were beautiful wild pools and lakes shut in by dense vegetation, so dense that at noon it was dark as twilight, and great table-lands of rock jutted out black and rugged in places; but chiefly as far as was to be seen stretched the deep entangled woodland, with nothing else to break it, brooding quietly over square leagues of swamp. The orioles were singing their sweetest, wildest music overhead; sign of war there was none, save, to be sure, now and then when I came on a black, arid circle where a few charred timbers showed where a hut had been burnt down and deserted, or my horse shied and snorted uneasily, and half stumbled over some shapeless log on the ground—a log that when you looked closer was the swollen shattered body of a man who had died hard, with the grass wrenched up in his fingers that the ants had eaten bare, and the hollows of his eyes staring open where the carrion birds had plucked the eyeballs out. And near *him* there were sure to be, halfsunk in swamp, or cleaned to skeletons by the eagles and hawks, five, or ten, or twenty more, lying nameless and unburied there, where they had fallen in some scuffle with pickets, or some stray cavalry skirmish, to be told off as "missing," and to be thought of no more. These groups I came upon more than once rotting among the rich Virginian soil, while the scarlet and purple weight of blossoming boughs swayed above, and the bright insect life fluttered humming around them; they were the only highway marks through the wooded wilderness.

So lonely was it mile after mile, and so little notion had I of either the way in or the way out, that the *hallali!* of a boar-hunt, or the sweet mellow tongues of the hounds when they have found in the coverts at home, were never brighter music to me than the sharp crack of rifles and the long sullen roll of musketry as they suddenly broke the silence, while I rode along, firing from the west that lay on my left. The grey, used to powder, pointed his ears and quickened his pace. Though a weedy, fiddle-headed beast, his speed was not bad, and I rattled him over the ground, crashing through undergrowth and wading through pools, with all my blood up at the tune of those ringing cheery shots; the roar growing louder and louder with every moment, and the sulphur scent of the smoke borne stronger and stronger down on the wind, till the horse broke *pêle-mêle* through the network of parasites; dashed downward along a slope of dank herbage, slipping at every step, and with his hind-legs tucked under him; and shot, like a run-in for a race, on to a green plateau, where the skirmish was going on in hot earnest.

A glance told me how the land lay. A handful of Southern troopers held their own with tremendous difficulty against three divisions of Federal infantry, whom they had unexpectedly encountered, as the latter were marching across the plateau with some batteries of foot artillery,—the odds were probably scarcely less than five to one. The Southerners were fighting magnificently, as firm in their close square of four hundred as the Consular Guard at Marengo, but so surrounded by the Northern host that they looked like a little island circled round by raging breakers. Glancing down on the plain as my horse scoured and slid along the incline, the nucleus of Southerners looked hopelessly lost amidst the belching fire and pressing columns of the enemy. The whole was surrounded and hidden by the whirling clouds of dust and smoke that swirled above in a white heavy mist; but through this the sabres flashed, the horses' heads reared, maddened and foam-covered, like so many bas-reliefs of Bucephalus, the lean rifle-barrels glittered, and for a moment I saw the Southern leader, steady as a rock in the centre, hewing like a trooper right and left, and with a grey heron's feather floating from his sombrero, a signal that seemed as well known and as closely followed as the snowy plume of Murat.

To have looked on at this and not have taken a share in it, one would have been a stone, not a man, and much less a cavalry-man; I need not tell you that I smashed the grey across the plateau, hurled him into the thick of the mêlee, dashed *somehow* through the Federal ranks, and was near the grey plume and fighting for the Old Dominion before you could have shouted a stave of "Dixie." I was a "non-combatant," I was a "neutral"—delicate Anglo-euphemism for coward, friends to neither and traitor to both!—I was on a tour of observation, and had no business to fire a shot for one or the other perhaps, but I forgot all that, and with the bridle in my teeth and a pistol in each hand, I rode down to give one blow the more for the weak side.

How superbly that Grey Feather fought!—keeping his men well up round him, though saddle after saddle was emptied, and horse after horse tore riderless out of the ranks, or reeled over on their heads, spurting blood, he sat like a statue, he fought like a Titan, his sabre seemed flashing unceasingly in the air, so often was it raised to come down again like lightning through a sword-arm, or lay open a skull to the brains; the shots ploughed up the earth round him, and rattled like hail through the air, a score of balls were aimed at him alone, a score of sabres crossed his own; but he was cool as St. Lawrence ice, and laid the men dead in struggling heaps under his charger's hoofs: only to fight near the man was a glorious intoxication; you seemed to "breath blood" till you got drunk with it.

The four hundred had been mowed down to two. I did as good work as I could, having wrenched a sword out of some dead trooper's hand; but I was only one, and the Northerners counted by thousands. Come out of it alive I never expected to do; but I vow it was the happiest day of my life—the pace was so splendidly fast! The Grey Feather at last glanced anxiously round; his men stuck like death to him, ready to be hewed down one by one, and die game; his teeth were set tight, and his eyes had a flash in them like steel. "Charge! and cut through!" he shouted, his voice rolling out like a clarion, giving an order that it seemed could be followed by nothing short of supernatural aid. The Southrons thought otherwise; they only heard to obey; they closed up as steadily as though they were a squadron on parade, despite the great gaps between them of dying chargers, and of heaped-up killed and wounded, that broke their ranks like so much piled stones and timber; they halted a moment, the murderous fire raking them right and left, front and rear; then, with that dense mass of troops round them, they charged; shivered the first line that wedged them in; pierced by sheer force of impetus the columns that opened fire in their path; wrenched themselves through as through the steel jaws of a trap, and swept out on to the green level of the open plateau, with a wild rallying Virginian shout that rings in my ears now!

I have been in a good many hot things in my time; but I never knew anything that for pace and long odds could be anything near to that.

I had kept with them through the charge with no other scratch than a shoulder-cut; and I had been close to their chief through it all. When we were clean out on the plains beyond pursuit—for the Union-men had not a squadron of cavalry, though their guns at long range belched a storm in our wake—he turned in his saddle without checking his mare's thundering gallop, and levelled his rifle that was slung at his side. "I'll have the General, anyhow," he said, quietly taking aim—still without checking his speed—at the knot of staff-officers that now were scarce more than specks in a blurred mass of mist. He fired; and the centre figure in that indistinct and fast-vanishing group fell from the saddle, while the yell of fury that the wind faintly floated nearer told us that the shot had been deadly. The Grey Feather laughed, a careless airy laugh of triumph, while he swept on at topmost pace; a little more, and we should dive down into the dark aisles of grand forest trees and cavernous ravines of timber roads, safe from all pursuit; a second, and we should reach the green core of the safe and silent woods, the cool shelter of mountain-backed lakes, the sure refuge of tangled coverts. It was a guinea to a shilling that we gained it; it was all but won; a moment's straight run-in, and we should have it! But that moment was not to be ours.

Out of the narrow cleft of a valley on the left, all screened with hanging tumbled foliage, and dark as death, there poured suddenly across our front a dense body of Federal troopers and Horse Artillery, two thousand strong at the least, full gallop, to join the main army. We were surrounded in a second, in a second overpowered by sheer strength of numbers; only two hundred of us, many sorely wounded, and on mounts that were jaded and ridden out of all pace, let us fight as we would, what could we do against fresh and picked soldiers, swarming down on us like a swarm of hornets, while in our rear was the main body through which we had just cut our way? That the little desperate band "died hard," I need not say; but the vast weight of the fresh squadrons pressed our little knot in as if between the jaws of a trap, crushing it like grain between two iron weights. The Grey Feather fought like all the Knights of the Round Table merged in one, till he streamed with blood from head to foot, and his sabre was hacked and bent like an ash-stick, as did a man near him, a tall superb Virginian, handsome as any Vandyke or Velasquez picture. At last both the Grey Feather and he went down, not by death—it would not come to them—but literally hurled out of their stirrup-leathers by crowding scores who poured on them, hamstrung or shot their horses, and made them themselves prisoners—not, however, till the assailants lay heaped ten deep about their slaughtered chargers. For myself, a blow from a sabre, a second afterwards, felled me like so much wood. I saw a whirling blaze of sun, a confused circling eddy of dizzy colour, forked flames, and flashes of light, and I knew no more, till I opened my eyes in a dark, square, unhealthy wooden chamber, with a dreamy but settled conviction that I was dead, and in the family vault, far away under the green old elms of Warwickshire, with the rooks cawing above my head.

As the delusion dissipated and the mists cleared, I saw through the uncertain light a face that was strangely but vaguely familiar to me, connected somehow with incoherent memories of life at home, and yet unknown to me. It was bronzed deeply, bearded, with flakes of grey among the fairness of the hair, much aged, much worn, scarred and stained just now with the blood of undressed wounds and the dust of the combat, for there was no one merciful enough there to bring a stoup of water; it was rougher, darker, sterner, and yet, with it all, nobler, too, than the face that I had known. I lay and stared blankly at it; it was the face of the Southern Leader of the morning, who sat now, on a pile of straw, looking wearily out to the dying sun, one amongst a group of twenty, prisoners all, like myself. I moved, and he turned his eyes on me; they had laid me down there as a "gone coon," and were amazed to see me come to life again. As our eyes met I knew him—he was Deadly Dash.

The old name left my lips with a shout as strong as a half-killed man can give. It seemed so strange to meet him there, captives together in the Unionists' hands! It struck him with a sharp shock. England and he had been divorced so long. I saw the blood leap to his forehead, and the light into his glance; then, with a single stride, he reached the straw I lay on, holding my hands in his, looking on me with the kindly eyes that had used to make me like the Killer, and greeting me with a warmth that was only damped and darkened by regret that my battle done for fair Virginia had laid me low, a prisoner with himself, and that we should meet thus, in so sharp an hour of adversity, with nothing before us but the Capitol, the Carroll prison, or worse. Yet thus we did meet once more, and I knew at last what had been the fate of Deadly Dash, whom England had outlawed as a scoundrel, and the New World had found a hero.

Though suffering almost equally himself, he tended me with the kindliest sympathy; he came out of his own care to ponder how possible it might be to get me eventual freedom as a tourist and a mere accidental sharer in the fray; he was interested to hear all that I would tell him of my own affairs and of his old friends in England, but of himself he would not speak; he simply said he had been fighting for the Confederacy ever since the war had begun; and I saw that he strove in vain to shake off a deep heart-broken gloom that seemed to have settled on him, doubtless, as I thought, from the cruel defeat of the noon, and the hopeless captivity into which he, the most restless and the most daring soldier that ever saw service, was now flung.

I noticed, too, that every now and then while he sat beside me, talking low—for there were sentinels both in and out the rude outhouse of the farm that had been turned into our temporary prison—his eyes wandered to the gallant Virginian who had been felled down with himself, and who, covered like himself with blood and dust, and with his broken left arm hanging shattered, lay on the bare earth in a far-off corner motionless and silent, with his lips pressed tight under their long black moustaches, and such a mute unutterable agony in his eyes as I never saw in any human face, though I have seen deaths enough in the field and the sick-ward. The rest of the Confederate captives were more ordinary men (although from none was a single word of lament ever wrenched); but this superb Virginian excited my interest, and I asked his name, in that sort of languid curiosity at passing things which comes with weakness, of the Killer, whose glance so incessantly wandered towards him.

"Stuart Lane," he answered, curtly, and added no more; but if I ever saw in this world hatred, passionate, ungovernable, and intense, I saw it in the Killer's look as his glance flashed once more on to the motionless form of the handsomest, bravest, and most dauntless officer of his gallant regiment that he had seen cut to pieces there on that accursed plateau.

"A major of yours?" I asked him. "Ah, I thought so; he fought magnificently. How wretched he looks, though he is too proud to show it!"

"He is thinking of—of his bride. He married three weeks ago."

The words were simple enough, and spoken very quietly; but there was an unsteadiness, as of great effort, over them; and the heel of his heavy spurred jack-boot crashed into the dry mud with a grinding crush, as though it trod terrible memories down. Was it a woman who was between these two comrades in arms and companions in adversity? I wondered if it were so, even in that moment of keen and heavy anxiety for us all, as I looked at the face that bent very kindly over the straw to which a shot in the knee and a deep though not dangerous shoulder-wound bound me. It was very different to the face of eight or nine years before—browner, harder, graver far; and yet there was a look as if "sorrow had passed by there," and swept the old heartlessness and gay callousness away, burning them out in its fires.

Silence fell over us in that wretched outshed where we were huddled together. I was hot with incipient fever, and growing light-headed enough, though I knew what passed before me, to speak to Dash once or twice in a dreamy idea that we were in the Shires watching the run-in for the "Soldiers' Blue Riband." The minutes dragged very drearily as the day wore itself away. There were the sullen monotonous tramp of the sentinels to and from, and, from without, the neighing of horses, the bugle calls, the roll of the drums, the challenge of outposts—all the varied, endless sounds of a camp; for the farm-house in whose shed we were thrown was the head-quarters *pro tem.* of the Federal General who commanded the Divisions that had cost the Killer's handful of Horse so fearfully dear. We were prisoners, and escape was impossible. All arms of course had been removed from us; most, like myself, were too disabled by wounds to have been able to avail ourselves of escape had it been possible; and the guard was doubled both in and out the shed; there was nothing before any of us but the certainty of imprisonment in all its horrors in some far-off fortress or obscure gaol. There was the possible chance that, since certain officers on whom the Northerners set great store had lately fallen into Southern hands, an exchange might be effected: yet, on the other side, graver apprehensions still existed, since we knew that the General into whose camp we had been brought had proclaimed his deliberate purpose of shooting the three next Secessionist officers who fell into his power, in requital for three of his own officers who had been shot, or were said to have been shot, by a Southern raider. We knew very well that, the threat made, it would be executed; and each of us, as the sun sank gradually down through the hot skies that were purple and stormy after the burning day, knew too, that it might never rise again to greet our sight. None of us would have heeded whether a ball would hit or miss us in the open, in a fair fight, in a man-to-man struggle; but the boldest and most careless amidst us felt it very bitter to die like dogs, to die as prisoners.

Even Deadly Dash, coolest, most hardened, most devil-may-care of soldiers and of sinners, sat with his gaze fastened on the slowly sinking light in the west with the shadow of a great pain upon his face, while every now and then his glance wandered to Stuart Lane, and a quick, irrepressible shudder shook him whenever it did so. The Virginian never moved; no sign of any sort escaped him; but the passionate misery that looked out of his eyes I never saw equalled, except, perhaps, in the eyes of a stag that I once shot in Wallachia, and that looked up with just such a look before it died. He was thinking, no doubt, of the woman he loved—wooed amidst danger, won amidst calamity, scarcely possessed ere lost for ever;—thinking of her proud beauty, of her bridal caress, that would never again touch his lips, of her fair life that would perish with the destruction of his.

Exhaustion from the loss of blood made everything pass dreamily, and yet with extraordinary clearness, before me. I felt in a wakening dream, and had no sense whatever of actual existence, and yet the whole scene was so intensely vital and vivid to me, that it seemed burned into my very brain itself. It was like the phantasmagoria of delirium, utterly impalpaple, but yet intensely real. I had no power to act or resist, but I seemed to have ten times redoubled power to see and hear and feel; I was aware of all that passed with a hundred-fold more susceptibility to it than I ever felt in health. I remember a total impossibility that came on me to decide whether I was dreaming or was actually awake. Twilight fell, night came; there was a change of sentries, and a light, set up in a bottle, shed a glittering, feeble, yellow gleam over the interior of the shed, on the dark Rembrandt faces of the Southerners and on the steel of the guards' bayonets. And I recollect that the Killer, who sat by the tossed straw on which they had flung me, laughed the old, low, sweet, half-insolent laugh that I had known so well in early days. "*Il faut souffrir pour être beau!* We are picturesque, at any rate, quite Salvatoresque! Little Dickey would make a good thing of us if he could paint us now. He is alive, I suppose?"

I answered him I believe in the affirmative; but the name of that little Bohemian of the Brush, who had used to be our butt and *protégé* in England, added a haze the more to my senses. By this time I had difficulty to hold together the thread of how, and when, and why I had thus met again the face that looked out on me so strangely familiarly in the dull, sickly trembling of the feeble light of this black noisome shed in the heart of Federal Divisions.

Through that haze I heard the challenge of the sentries; I saw a soldier prod with his bayonet a young lad who had fainted from hemorrhage, and whom he swore at for shamming. I was conscious of the entrance of a group of officers whom I knew afterwards to be the Northern General and his staff, who came to look at their captives. I knew, but only dreamily, still, that these men were the holders of our fate, and would decide on it then and there. I felt a listless indifference, utter and opium-like, as to what became of me, and I remember that Stuart Lane, and Dash himself, rose together, and stood looking with a serene and haughty disdain down on the conquerors who held their lives in the balance—without a trace of pain upon their faces now. I remember how like they looked to stags that turn at bay; like the stags, outnumbered, hunted down, with the blood of open wounds and the dust of the long chase on them; but, like the deer, too, uncowed, and game to the finish.

Very soon their doom was given. Seven were to be sent back with a flag of truce to be exchanged for the seven Federal officers they wanted out of the Southerners' hands, ten were to be transmitted to the prisons of the North,—three were to be shot at day-dawn in the reprisal before named. The chances of life and of death were to be drawn for by lottery, and at once.

Not a sound escaped the Virginians, and not a muscle of their English Leader's face moved: the prisoners, to a man, heard impassively, with a grave and silent dignity, that they were to throw the die in hazard, with death for the croupier and life for the stake.

The General and his staff waited to amuse themselves with personally watching the turns of this new *Rouge et Noir;* gambling in lives was a little refreshing change that sultry, dreary, dun-coloured night, camped amongst burnt-out farms and wasted corn-lands.

Slips of paper with "exchange," "death," and "imprisonment" written on them in the numbers needed were made ready, rolled up, and tossed into an empty canteen; each man was required to come forward and draw, I alone excepted because I was an officer of the British Army. I remember passionately arguing that they had no right to exempt me, since I had been in the fray, and had killed three men on my own hook, and would have killed thirty more had I had the chance; but I was perhaps incoherent in the fever that was fast seizing all my limbs from the rack of undressed wounds; at any rate, the Northerners took no heed save to force me into silence, and the drawing began. As long as I live I shall see that night in remembrance with hideous distinctness: the low blackened shed with its fœtid odours from the cattle lately foddered there; the yellow light flaring dully here and there; the glisten of the cruel rifles; the heaps of straw and hay soaked with clotted blood; the group of Union Officers standing near the doorway; and the war-worn indomitable faces of the Southerners, with the fairer head and slighter form of their English Chief standing out slightly in front of all.

The Conscription of Death commenced; a Federal private took the paper from each man as he drew it, and read the word of destiny aloud. Not one amongst them faltered or paused one moment; each went,—even those most exhausted, most in agony,—with a calm and steady step, as they would have marched up to take the Flag of the Stars and Bars from Lee or Longstreet. Not one waited a second's breath before he plunged his hand into the fatal lottery.

Deadly Dash was the first called: there was not one shadow of anxiety upon his face; it was calm without effort, careless without bravado, simply, entirely indifferent. They took his paper and read the words of safety and of life—"Exchange." Then, for one instant, a glory of hope flashed like the sun into his eyes—to die the next; die utterly.

Three followed him, and they all drew the fiat for detention; the fifth called was Stuart Lane.

Let him have suffered as he would, he gave no sign of it now; he approached with his firm, bold cavalry step, and his head haughtily lifted; the proud, fiery, dauntless, Cavalier of ideal and of romance. Without a tremor in his wrist he drew his paper out and gave it.

One word alone fell distinct on the silence like the hiss of a shot through the night—"*Death!*"

He bowed his head slightly as if in assent, and stepped backward—still without a sign.

His English Chief gave him one look—it was that of merciless exultation, of brutal joy, of dark, Cain-like, murderous hate; but it passed, passed quickly: Dash's head sank on his chest, and on his face there was the shadow, I think, of a terrible struggle—the shadow, I know, of a great remorse. He strove with his longing greed for this man's destruction; he knew that he thirsted *to see him die.*

The Virginian stood erect and silent: a single night and the strong and gallant life, the ardent passions, the chivalrous courage to do and dare, and the love that was in its first fond hours, would all be quenched in him as though they had never been; but he was a soldier, and he gave no sign that his death-warrant was not as dear to him as his bridal-night had been. Even his conquerors cast one glance of admiration on him; it was only his leader who felt for him no pang of reverence and pity.

The lottery continued; the hazard was played out; life and death were scattered at reckless chance amidst the twenty who were the playthings of that awful gaming; all had been done in perfect silence on the part of the condemned; not one seemed to think or to feel for himself, and in those who were sent out to their grave not a grudge lingered against their comrades of happier fortune. Deadly Dash, whose fate was release, alone stood with his head sunk, thoughtful and weary.

The three condemned to execution were remanded to separate and solitary confinement, treated already as felons for that one short night which alone remained to them. As his guards removed him, Stuart Lane paused slightly, and signed to his chief to approach him; he held out his hand to Dash, and his voice was very low, though it came to my ear where they stood beside me: "We were rivals once, but we may be friends *now.* As you have loved her, be pitiful to her when you tell her of my death,—God knows it may be hers! As you have loved her, feel what it is to die without one last look on her face!"

Then, and then only, his bronze cheek grew white as a woman's, and his whole frame shook with one great silent sob; his guard forced him on, and his listener had made him no promise, no farewell; neither had he taken his hand. He had heard in silence, with a dark and evil gloom alone upon him.

The Federal General sharply summoned him from his musing, as the chief of those to be exchanged on the morrow under a white flag of parley; there were matters to be stated to and to be arranged with him.

"I will only see you alone, General," he answered, curtly.

The Northerner stared startled, and casting a glance over the redoubtable leader of horse, whose grey feather had become known and dreaded, thought of possible assassination. Deadly Dash laughed his old light, ironic, contemptuous laugh.

"A wounded unarmed man can scarcely kill you! Have as many of your staff about you as you please, but let none of my Virginians be present at our interview."

The Northerners thought he intended to desert to them, or betray some movement of importance, and assented; and he went out with them from the cattle-shed into the hot, stormy night, and the Southerners who were condemned to death and detention looked after him with a long, wistful, dog-like look. They had been with him in so many spirit-stirring days and nights of peril, and they knew that never would they meet again. He had given not one of them a word of adieu; he had killed too many to be touched by his soldiers' loss. Who could expect pity from Deadly Dash?

An hour passed; I was removed under a guard to a somewhat better lodging in the granary, where a surgeon hastily dressed my wounds, and left me on a rough pallet with a jug of water at my side, and the sentinel for my only watcher, bidding me "sleep." Sleep! I could not have slept for my ransom. Though life had hardened me, and made me sometimes, as I fear, callous enough, I could not forget those who were to die when the sun rose; specially, I could not forget that gallant Virginian to whom life was so precious, yet who gave himself with so calm a fortitude to his fate. The rivalry, I thought, must be deep and cruel, to make the man from whom he had won what they both loved turn from him in hatred, even in such extremity as his. On the brink of a comrade's grave, feud might surely have been forgotten.

All that had just passed was reeling deliriously through my brain, and I was panting in the sheer irritation and exhaustion of gunshot wounds, when through the gloom Dash entered the granary, closely guarded, but allowed to be with me on account of our common country. Never was I more thankful to see a familiar face from home than to see his through the long watches of that burning, heavy, interminable night. He refused to rest; he sat by me tending me as gently as a woman, though he was suffering acutely himself from the injuries received in the course of the day; he watched me unweariedly, though often and often his gaze and his thoughts wandered far from me, as he looked out through the open granary door, past the form of the sentinel, out to the starry solemn skies, the deep woods, and the dark silent land over which the stars were brooding, large and clear.

Was he thinking of the Virginian whose life would die out for ever with the fading of those stars, or of the woman whom he had lost, whose love was the doomed soldier's, and would never be his own, though the grave closed over his rival with the morrow's sun? Dreamily, half unconsciously, in the excitement of fever, I asked him of her of whom I knew nothing:

"Did you love that woman so well?"

His eyes were still fixed on the distant darkening skies, and he answered quietly, as though rather to his own thoughts than my words: "Yes; I love her—as I never loved in that old life in England; as we never love but once, I think."

"And she?"

"And she—has but one thought in the world—*him*."

His voice, as he answered, now grated with dull, dragging misery over the words.

"Had she so much beauty that she touched you like this?"

He smiled slightly, a faint, mournful smile, unutterably sad.

"Yes; she is very lovely, but her beauty is the least rare charm. She is a woman for whom a man would live his greatest, and if he cannot live for her—may—die."

The utterance was very slow, and seemed to lie on me like a hand on my lips compelling me to silence; he had forgotten all, except his memory of her, and where he sat with his eyes fixed outward on the drifting clouds that floated across the stars, I saw his lips quiver once, and I heard him murmur half aloud: "My darling! My darling! You will know how I loved you *then*——"

And the silence was never broken between us, but he sat motionless thus all the hours through, looking out at the deep still woods, and the serene and lustrous skies, till the first beams of the sun shone over the hills in the east, and I shuddered, where I lay, at its light;—for I knew it was the signal of death.

Then he arose, and bent towards me, and the kindly eyes of old looked down on mine.

"Dear old fellow, the General expects me at dawn. I must leave you just now; say good-bye."

His hand closed on mine, he looked on me one moment longer, a little lingeringly, a little wistfully, then he turned and went out with his guard; went out into the young day that was just breaking on the world.

I watched his shadow as it faded, and I saw that the sun had risen wholly; and I thought of those who were to die with the morning light.

All was very calm for awhile; then the beat of a drum rolled through the quiet of the dawn, and the measured tramp of armed men sounded audibly; my heart stood still, my lips felt parched —I knew the errand of that column marching so slowly across the parched turf. A little while longer yet, and I heard the sharp ring of the ramrods being withdrawn, and the dull echo of the charge being rammed down: with a single leap, as though the bullets were through me, I sprang weak as I was, from my wretched pallet, and staggered to the open doorway, leaning there against the entrance, powerless and spell-bound. I saw the file of soldiers loading; I saw the empty coffin-shells; I saw three men standing bound, their form distinct against the clear, bright haze of morning, and the fresh foliage of the woods. Two of them were Virginians, but the third was not Stuart Lane.

With a great cry I sprang forward, but the guards seized my arms and held me, helpless as a woman, in their gripe. He whom we had called Deadly Dash heard, and looked up and smiled. His face was tranquil and full of light, as though the pure peace of the day shone there.

The gripe of the sentinels held me as if in fetters of iron: the world seemed to rock and reel under me, a sea of blood seemed eddying before my eyes; the young day was dawning, and murder was done in its early hours, and I was held there to look on—its witness, yet powerless to arrest it! I heard the formula —so hideous then!—"Make ready!"—"Present!"—"Fire!" I saw the long line of steel tubes belch out their smoke and flame.

I heard the sullen echo of the report roll down from the mountains above. When the mist cleared away, the three figures stood no longer clear against the sunlight; they had fallen.

With the mad violence of desperation, I wrenched myself from my guards, and staggered to him where he lay; he was not quite dead yet; the balls had passed though his lungs, but he breathed still; his eyes were unclosed and the gleam of a last farewell came in them. He smiled slightly, faintly, once more.

"She will know how I loved her now. Tell her I died for her," he said, softly, while his gaze looked upwards to the golden sun-rays rising in the east.

And with these words life passed away, the smile still lingering gently on his lips;—and I knew no more, for I fell like a man stunned down by him where he was stretched beside the grave that they had hewn for him ere he was yet dead.

I knew when I saw him there, as well as I knew by detail long after, that he had offered his life for Stuart Lane's, and that it had been accepted; the Virginian, ignorant of the sacrifice made for him, had been sent to the Southern lines during the night, told by the Northerners that he was pardoned on his parole to return in his stead a distinguished Federal officer lately captured by him. He knew nothing, dreamt nothing, of the exchange by which his life was given back to the woman who loved him, when his English Leader died in his place as the sun rose over the fresh summer world, never again to rise for those whose death-shot rang sullen and shrill through its silence.

So Deadly Dash died, and his grave is nameless and unknown there under the shadow of the great Virginian forests. He was outlawed, condemned, exiled, and the world would see no good in him; sins were on him heavily, and vices lay darkly at his door; but when I think of that grave in the South, where the grass grows so rankly now, and only the wild deer pauses, I doubt if there was not that in him which may well shame the best amongst us. We never knew him justly till he perished there.

And my friend who told me this said no more, but took up his *brûle-gueule* regretfully. The story is given as he gave it, and the States could whisper from the depths of their silent woods many tales of sacrifice as generous, of fortitude as great. That when he had related it he was something ashamed of having felt it so much, is true; and you must refer the unusual weakness, as he did, to the fact that he told it on the off-day of the Derby, after having put a cracker on Wild Charlie. A sufficient apology for any number of frailties!

THE GENERAL'S MATCH-MAKING;

OR,

COACHES AND COUSINSHIP.

"WHERE the devil shall I go this Long? Paris is too hot; the inside of my adorable Château des Fleurs would give one a lively idea of the feelings of eels in a frying-pan. Rome's only fit to melt down puffy cardinals, as jocks set themselves before the kitchen fire preparatory to the Spring Meetings. In Switzerland there's nothing fit to eat. Spain might be the ticket—the Andalusians are a good-looking lot, but they haven't a notion of beer. Scotland I daren't enter, because I know I should get married under their rascally laws. I'd go to the Bads, but the V. P.'s fillies say they mean to do 'em this summer, and I won't risk meeting them if I know it; the baits they set to catch the unsuspecting are quite frightful. Where the devil *shall* I go?"

So spoke Sydenham Morton, whilom Captain of Eton, now in due course having passed up to King's, discussing ham-pie and audit, devils and coffee, while the June sun streamed through the large oriel windows.

"*To* the devil, I fear, if you only find your proper fraternity," said a man, coming in. Oak was never sported by Sydie, except when he was rattling certain little squares of ivory in boxes lined with green felt.

"Ah, Mr. Keane, is that you? Come in."

The permission was needless, insomuch as Keane was already in and down on a rocking-chair.

"One o'clock, and only just begun your breakfast! I have finished more than half my day's work."

"I dare say," answered Sydie; "but one shining light like you, monseigneur, is enough for a college. Why should I exert myself? I swore I hadn't four marks a year, and I've my fellowship for telling the furbelow. We all go in for the dolce here, except you, and you're such a patent machine for turning out Q.E.D.s by the dozen, that you can no more help working than the bedmaker can help taking my tea and saying the cat did it, and 'May she never be forgiven if she ever so much as looked at that there blessed lock.' I say, find a Q.E.D. for me to the most vexatious problem, where I'm to go this Long?"

"Go a quiet reading tour; mark out a regular plan, and travel somewhere rugged and lonely, with not a crinoline, or a trout-stream, or a pack of hounds within a hundred miles; the middle of Stonehenge, for example, or with the lighthouse men out at the Smalls or Eddystone. You'd do wonders when you came back, Sydie."

Sydie shook his head and puffed gravely at his pipe.

"Thank you, sir. Cramming's not my line. As for history, I don't see anything particularly interesting in the blackguardisms of men all dust and ashes and gelatine now; if I were the Prince of Wales, I might think it my duty to inquire into the characters of my grandfathers; but not being that individual, I find the Derby list much more suited to my genius. As for the classics, they won't help me to ask for my dinner at Tortoni's, nor to ingratiate myself with the women at the Maison Dorée; and I prefer following Ovid's counsels, and enjoying the Falernian of life represented in these days by milk-punch, to plodding through the De Officiis. As for mathematics, it *may* be something very grand to draw triangles and circles till A meets B because C is as long as D; but I know, when I did the same operation in chalk when I was a small on the nursery floor, my nurse (who might have gone along with the barbarian who stuck Archimedes) called me an idle brat. Well, I say, about the Long? Where are *you* going, most grave and reverend seignior?"

"Where there are no impertinent boys, if there be such a paradise on earth," rejoined Keane, lighting his pipe. "I go to my moor, of course, for the 12th, but until then I haven't made up my mind. I think I shall scamper over South America; I want freshening up, and I've a great fancy to see those buried cities, not to mention a chance of buffalo hunting."

"Travelling's such a bore," interrupted Sydie, stretching himself out like an india-rubber tube. "Talk of the cherub that's always sitting up aloft to watch over poor Jack, there are always ten thousand demons watching over the life of any luckless Æothen; there are the custom-house men, whose natural prey he becomes, and the hotel-keepers who fasten on him to suck his life-blood, and there are the mosquitoes, and other things less minute but not less agonising; and there are guides and muleteers, and waiters and ciceroni—oh, hang it! travelling's a dreadful bore, if it were only for the inevitable widow with four daughters whom you've danced with once at a charity ball, who rushes up to you on the Boulevards or a Rhine steamer, and tacks herself on to you, and whom it's well for you if you can shake off when you scatter the dust of the city from the sole of your foot."

"You can't chatter, can you?"

"Yes; my frænum was happily cut when I was a baby. Fancy what a loss the world would have endured if it hadn't been!" said Sydie, lazily shutting his half-closed blue eyes. "I say, the governor has been bothering my life out to go down to St. Crucis! he's an old brick, you know, and has the primest dry in the kingdom. I wish you'd come, will you? There's capital fishing and cricketing, and you'd keep me company. Do. You shall have the best mount in the kingdom, and the General will do you no end of good on Hippocrates' rule—contrarieties cure contrarieties!"

"I'll think about it; but you know I prefer solitude generally; misanthropical, I admit, but decidedly lucky for me, as my companions through life will always be my ink-stand, my terrier, and my papers. I have never wished for any other yet, and I hope I never shall. Are you going to smoke and drink audit on that sofa all day?"

"No," answered Sydie, "I'm going to take a turn at beer and Brown's for a change. Well, I shall take you down with me on Tuesday, sir, so that's settled."

Keane laughed, and after some few words on the business that had brought him thither, went across the quad to his own rooms to plunge into the intricacies of Fourrier and

Laplace, or give the vigour of his brain to stuffing some young goose's empty head, or cramming some idle young dog with ballast enough to carry him through the shoals and quicksands of his Greats.

Gerald Keane was a mathematical Coach, and had taken high honours—a rare thing for a Kingsman to do, for are they not, by their own confession, the laziest disciples of the Dolce in the whole of Granta, invariably bumped and caught out, and from sheer idleness letting other men beat Lord's and shame the Oxford Eleven, and graduate with Double Firsts, while they lie perdus in the shades of Holy Henry? Keane, however, was the one exception to the rule. He was dreadfully wild, as ladies say, for his first term or two, though equally eloquent at the Union; then his family, exulting in the accuracies of their prophecies regarding his worthlessness, and somebody else daring him to go in for honours, his pluck was put up, and he set himself to work to show them all what he could do if he chose. Once roused to put out his powers, he liked using them; the bother of the training over, it is no trouble to keep place as stroke-oar; and now men pointed him out in the Senate House, and at the Senior Fellows' table, and he bid fair to rank with the writer on Jasher and the author of the Inductive Sciences.

People called him very cold. It was popularly averred that he had no more feeling than Roubilliac's or Thorwaldsen's statues; but as he was a great favourite with the undergrads, and always good-natured to them, there were a few men who doubted the theory, though *he* never tried to refute or dispute it.

Of all the young fellows, the one Keane liked the best, and to whom he was kindest, was Sydenham Morton—Sydie to everybody in Granta, from the little fleuriste opposite in King's Parade, to the V. P.'s wife, who petted him because his uncle was a millionaire—the dearest fellow in the world, according to all the Cambridge young ladies—the darling of all the milliner and confectioner girls in Trumpington-street and Petty Cury—the best chap going among the kindred spirits, who got gated, and lectured and rusticated, for skying over to Newmarket, or pommelling bargees, or taking a lark over at Cherryhinton—the best-dressed, fastest, and most charming of Cantabs, as he himself would gravely assure you.

They were totally dissimilar, and far asunder in position; but an affair on the slope of the Matterhorn, when the boy had saved the elder man's life, had riveted attachment between them, and bridged over the difference of their academical rank.

The Commencement came and went, with its speeches, and its H.R.H. Chancellor, and its pretty women gliding among the elms of Neville's Court (poor Leslie Ellis's daily haunt), filling the grim benches of the Senate House, and flitting past the carved benches of King's Chapel. Granta was henceforth a desert to all Cambridge belles; they could walk down Trumpington-street without meeting a score of little straw hats, and Trumpington-street became as odious as Sahara; the "darling Backs" were free to them, and, of course, they who, by all relations, from those of Genesis to those of Vanity Fair, have never cared, save for *fruit défendu*, saw nothing to admire in the trees, and grass, and river, minus outriggers and collegians. There was a general exodus: Masters' red hoods, Fellows Commoners' gold-lace, Fellows' gown and mortar boards, morning chapel surplices, and under grads' straw hats and cut-away coats, all vanished from court and library, street and cloister. Cambridge was empty; the married Dons and their families went off to country-houses or Rhine steamers; Fellows went touring with views to mediæval architecture, Roman remains, Greek inscriptions, Paris laisser aller, or Norwegian fishing, according to their tastes and habits; under-grads scattered themselves over the face of the globe, and were to be found in knots of two or three calling for stout in Vefour's, kicking up a row with Austrian gendarmerie, chalking up effigies of Bomba on Italian walls, striding up every mountain from Skiddaw to the Pic du Midi, burrowing like rabbits in a warren for reading purposes on Dartmoor, kissing sunny-haired Gretchens in German hostelries, swinging through the Vaterland with knapsacks and sticks, doing a walking tour—in fact, swarming everywhere with their impossible French, and hearty voices, and lithe English muscle, Granta marked on them as distinctly as an M.B. waistcoat marks an Anglican, or utter ignorance of modern politics a "great classic."

Cambridge had emptied itself of the scores of naughty boys that lie in the arms of Mater, and on Tuesday Keane and Sydie were shaking and rattling over those dreadful nervous Eastern Counties tenders, through that picturesque and beautiful country that does permutations with such laudable perseverance on pollards, fens, and flats—flats, fens, and pollards—at the snail's pace that, according to the G.E.R., we must believe to be "express."

"I wrote and told the governor you were coming down with me, sir," said Sydie, hanging up his hat. "I didn't tell him what a trouble I had to make you throw over South America for a fortnight, and come and taste his curry at the Beeches. You'll like the old boy; he's as hot and choleric, and as genial and good-hearted, as any old brick that ever walked. He was born as sweet-tempered and soft-mouthed as mamma when an eldest son waltzes twice with Adeliza, and the pepper's been put into him by the curry-powder, the gentleman-like transportation, and the unlimited command over black devils, enjoyed by gentlemen of the H.E.I.C.S."

"A nabob uncle," thought Keane. "Oh, I see, yellow, dyspeptic, always boring one with 'How to govern India,' and recollections of 'When I served with Napier.' What a fool I was to let Sydie persuade me to go. A month in Lima and the Pampas would be much pleasanter."

"He came over last year," continued Sydie, in blissful ignorance, "and bought the Beeches, a very jolly place, only he's crammed it with everything anybody suggested, and tried anything that any farmer recommended, so that the house and the estate present a peculiar compendium of all theories of architecture, and a general exhibition of all sorts of tastes. He's his hobbies; pouncing on and apprehending small boys is one of 'em, for which practice he is endeared to the youth of St. Crucis as the 'old cove,' the Injian devil, and like affectionate cognomens. But the general's weak point is me—me and little Fay."

"His mare, I suppose?"

"His mare!—bless my heart, no!—his mare!" And Sydie lay back, and laughed silently. "His mare! By George! what would she say? She's a good deal too lively a young lady to run in harness for anybody, though she's soft-mouthed enough when she's led. Mare! No, Fay's his niece—my cousin. Her father and my father went to glory when we were both smalls, and left us in legacy to the General, and a pretty pot of money the legacy has cost him."

"Your cousin, indeed! The name's more like a mare's than a girl's," answered Keane, thinking to himself. "A cousin! I just wish I'd known that. One of those Indian girls, I bet, tanned brown as a berry, flirts à outrance, has run the gauntlet of all the Calcutta balls, been engaged to men in all the Arms, talks horridly broad Anglo-Indian-English. I know the style."

The engine screamed, and pulled up at the St. Crucis station, some seventy miles farther on, lying in the midst of Creswickian landscapes, with woodlands, and cottages, and sweet fresh stretches of meadow-land, such as do one's heart good after hard days and late nights in dust and gaslight.

"Deuced fine points," said Sydie, taking the ribbons of a high-stepping bay that had brought one of the neatest possible traps to take him and Keane to the Beeches, and springing, in all his glory, to the box, than which no imperial throne could have offered to him one-half so delightful a seat. "Governor never keeps screws. What a crying shame we're not allowed to keep the sorriest hack at King's. That comes of gentlemen slipping into shoes that were meant for beggars. Hallo! there are the old beech-trees; I vow I can almost taste the curry and dry from looking at them."

In dashed the bay through the park-gates, sending the shingle flying up in small simooms, and the rooks cawing in supreme surprise from their nests in the branches of the beech-trees.

"Hallo, my ancient, how are you?" began Sydie to the butler, while that stately person expanded into a smile of welcome. "Down, dog, down! 'Pon my life, the old place looks very jolly. What have you hung all that armour up for;—to make believe our ancestors dwelt in these marble halls? How devilish dusty I am. Where's the General? Didn't know we were coming till next train. Fay! Fay! where are you? Ashton, where's Miss Morton?"

"Here, Sydie dear," cried the young lady in question, rushing across the hall with the most ecstatic delight, and throwing herself into the Cantab's arms, who received her with no less cordiality, and kissed her straightway, regardless of the presence of Keane, the butler, and Harris.

"Oh, Sydie," began the young lady, breathlessly, "I'm so delighted you're come. There's the archery fête, and a pic-nic at Shallowton, and an election ball over at Coverdale, and I want you to dance with me, and to try the new billiard-table, and to come and see my aviary, and to teach me pistol-shooting (because Julia Dupuis can shoot splendidly, and talks of joining the Rifles), and to show me how to do Euclid, and to amuse me, and to play with me, and to tell me which is the prettiest of Snowdrop's pups to be saved, and to——." She stopped suddenly, and dropped from enthusiastic tirade to subdued surprise, as she caught sight of Keane for the first time. "Oh, Sydie, why did you not introduce me to your friend? How rude I have been!"

"Mr. Keane, my cousin, the torment of my existence, Miss Morton in public, Little Fay in private life. There, you know one another now. I can't say any more. Do tell me where the governor is."

"Mr. Keane, what can you think of me?" cried Fay. "Any friend of Sydenham's is most welcome to the Beeches, and my uncle will scold me frightfully for giving you such a reception. Please do forgive me, I was so delighted to see my cousin."

"Which I can fully enter into, having a weakness for Sydie myself," smiled Keane. "I am sure he is very fortunate in being the cause of such an excuse."

Keane said it *par complaisance*, but rather carelessly; young ladies, as a class, being one of his aversions. He looked at Fay Morton, however, and saw she was not an Indianised girl after all. She was not yellow, but, *au contraire*, had waving fair hair, long dark eyes, and a mischievous, sunny face—

> A rosebud set with little wilful thorns,
> And sweet as English air could make her.

"Where's the governor, Fay?" reiterated Sydie.

"Here, my dear boy. Thought of your old uncle the first thing, Sydie? God bless my soul, how well you look! Confound you, why didn't you tell me what train you were coming by? Devil take you, Ashton, why's there no fire in the hall? Thought it was warm, did you? Hum! more fool you then."

"Uncle dear," said Miss Fay, "here is Sydie's friend, Mr. Keane; you are being as rude as I have been."

The General, at this conjuration, swung sharp round, a stout, hale, handsome old fellow, with grey moustaches and a high colour, holding a spade in his hand and clad in a linen coat.

"Bless my soul, sir," cried the General, shaking Keane's hand with the greatest possible energy, "charmed to see you—delighted, 'pon my honour; only hope you're come to stay till Christmas; there are plenty of bachelors' dens. Devil take me! of what was I thinking? I was pleased to see that boy, I suppose. More fool I, you'll say, a lazy, good-for-nothing young dog like him. Don't let me keep you standing in the hall. Cursed cold, isn't it? and there's Little Fay in muslin? Ashton, send some hot water into the west room for Mr.—Mr.——Confound you, Sydie, why didn't you tell—I mean, introduce me?—Mr. Keane. Luncheon will be on the table in ten minutes. Like curry, Mr. Keane? There, get along, Sydie, you foolish boy; you can talk to Fay, after luncheon."

"Sydie," whispered Fay, an hour before dinner, when she had teased the Cantab's life out of him till he had consented to pronounce judgment on the puppies, "what a splendid head that man has you brought with you; he'd do for Plato, with that grand calm brow and lofty unapproachable look. Who is he?"

"The greatest philosopher of modern times," responded her cousin, solemnly. "A condensation of Solon, Thales, Plutarch, Seneca, Cicero, Lucullus, Bion, Theophrastes and Co.; such a giant of mathematical knowledge, and all other knowledge, too, that every day, when he passes under Bacon's Gate, we are afraid the old legend will come to pass, and it will tumble down as flat as a pancake; a homage to him, but a loss to Cambridge."

"Nonsense," said Miss Fay impatiently. "(I like that sweet little thing with the black nose best, dear.) *Who* is he? What is he? How old is he? What's his name? Where does he live?"

"Gently, young woman," cried Sydie. "He is Tutor and Fellow of King's and a great gun besides; he's some twenty-five years older than you. His name on the rolls is Gerald, I believe, and he dwells in the shadow of Mater, beyond the reach of my cornet; for which fact, not being musically inclined, he is barbarian enough to return thanks daily in chapel."

"I am sorry he is come. It was stupid of you to bring him."

"Wherefore, *ma cousine?* Are you afraid of him? You needn't be. Young ladies are too insignificant atoms of creation for him to criticise. He'll no more expect sense from you than from Snowdrop and her pups."

"Afraid!" repeated Fay, with extreme indignation. "I should like to see any man of whom I should feel afraid! If he doesn't like fun and nonsense, I pity him; but if he despise me ever so much for it, I shall enjoy myself before him, and in spite of him. I was sorry you brought him, because he will take you away when I want you all to myself; and he looks so haughty, that——"

"You *are* afraid of him, Fay, and won't own it?"

"I am *not*," reiterated Fay, impetuously; "and I will smoke a cigar with him after dinner, to show you I am not one bit."

"I bet you six pair of gloves you do no such thing, young lady."

"Done. Do keep the one with a black nose, Sydie; and yet that little liver-coloured darling is too pretty to be killed. Suppose we save them all? Snowdrop will be so pleased."

Whereon Fay kissed all the little snub noses with the deepest affection, and was caught in the act by Keane and the General.

"There's that child with her arms full of dogs," said the General, beaming with satisfaction at sight of his niece. "She's a little spoilt, wilful thing. She's an old bachelor's pet, and you must make allowances. I call her the fairy of the Beeches, God bless her! She nursed me last winter, when I was at death's door from these cursed cold winds, sir, better than Miss Nightingale could have done. What a devilish climate it *is*; never two days alike. I don't wonder Englishwomen are such icicles, poor things; they're frost-bitten from their cradle upwards."

"India warms them up, General, doesn't it?"

The General shook with laughter.

"To be sure, to be sure; if prudery's the fashion, they'll wear it, sir, as they would patches of hair powder; but they're always uncommonly glad to leave it off and lock it out of sight when they can. What do you think of the kennels? I say, Sydie, confound you, why did you bring any traps down with you? Haven't room for 'em; not for one. Couldn't cram a tilbury into the coach-house."

"A trap, governor?" said Sydie, straightening his back after examination of the pups; "can't keep even a wall-eyed cab-horse; wish I could."

"Where's your drag, then?" demanded the General.

"My drag? Don't I just wish I had one, to offer my bosom friend the V.P. a seat on the box. Calvert, of Trinity, tooled us over in his to the Spring Meetings, and his greys are the sweetest pair of goers—the leaders especially—that ever you saw in harness. We came back 'cross country, to get in time for hall, and a pretty mess we made of it, for we broke the axle, and lamed the off-wheeler, and——"

"But, God bless my soul!" stormed the General, excited beyond measure, "you wrote me word you were going to bring a drag down with you, and of course I supposed you meant what you said, and I had Harris in about it, and he swore the coach-house was as full of traps as ever it could hold, so I had my tax-cart and Fay's phaeton turned into one of the stalls, and then, after all, it's comes out you've never brought it! Devil take you, Sydie, why can't you be more thoughtful——"

"But my dear governor——"

"Nonsense; don't talk to me!" cried the General, trying to work himself into a passion, and diving into the recesses of six separate pockets one after another. "Look here, sir; I suppose you'll believe your own words? Here it is in black and white.—'P.S. I shall bring *my Coach* down with me.' There, what do you say now? Confound you, what are you laughing at? *I* don't see anything to laugh at. In my day, young fellows didn't make fools of old men in this way. Bless my soul! why the devil don't you leave off laughing, and talk a little common sense? The thing's plain enough.—'P.S. *I shall bring my Coach down with me.*'"

"So I have," said Sydie, screaming with laughter. "Look at him—he's a first-rate Coach, too! Wheels always oiled, and ready for any road; always going up hill, and never caught coming down! started at a devil of a pace, and now keeps ahead of all other vehicles on all highways. A first-class Coach, that will tool me through the tortuous lanes and treacherous pitfalls of the Greats with flying colours. My Coach! Bravo, General! that's the best bit of fun I've had since I dressed up like Sophonisba Briggs, and led the V.P. a dance all round the quad, every hair on his head standing erect in his virtuous indignation at the awful morals of his college."

"Eh, what?" grunted the General, light beginning to dawn upon him. "Do you mean Mr. Keane? Hum! how's one to be up to all your confounded slang? How could I know? Devil take you, Sydie, why can't you write common English? You young fellows talk as bad jargon as Sepoys. You're sure I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Keane, though I did make the mistake."

"Thank you, General," said Keane; "but it's rather cool of you, Master Sydie, to have forced me on to your uncle's hands without his wish or his leave."

"Not at all, not at all," swore the General, with vehement cordiality. "I gave him carte blanche to ask whom he would, and unexpected guests are always most welcome; *not* that you were unexpected though, for I told that boy to be sure and bring somebody down here——"

"And have had the tax-cart and my phaeton turned out to make comfortable quarters for him," said Miss Fay, with a glance at the Coach to see how he took chaff, "and I only hope Mr. Keane may like his accommodation."

"Perhaps, Miss Morton," said Keane, smiling, "I shall like it so well that you will have to say to me as poor Voltaire to his troublesome abbé, 'Don Quichotte prenait les auberges pour les châteaux, mais vous avez pris les châteaux pour les auberges.'"

"Tiresome man," thought Fay. "I wish Sydie hadn't brought him here; but I shall do as I always do, however grand and supercilious he may look. He has lived among all those men and books till he has grown as cold as granite. What a pity it is people don't enjoy existence as I do!"

"You are thinking, Miss Morton," said Keane, as he walked on beside her, with an amused glance at her face, which was expressive enough of her thoughts, "that if your uncle is glad to see me, you are not, and that Sydie was very stupid not to bring down one of his kindred spirits instead of——Don't disclaim it now; you should veil your face if you wish your thoughts not to be read."

"I was not going to disclaim it," said Fay, quickly looking up at him with a rapid glance, half penitence, half irritation. "I always tell the truth; but I was *not* thinking exactly that; I don't want any of Sydie's friends—I detest boys—but I certainly *was* thinking that as you look down on everything that we all delight in, I fancied you and the Beeches will hardly agree. If I am rude, you must not be angry; you wanted me to tell you the truth."

Keane smiled again.

"Do I look down on the things you delight in? I hardly know enough of you, as we have only addressed about six syllables to each other, to be able to judge what you like and what you don't like; but certainly I must admit, that caressing the little round heads of those puppies yonder, which seemed to afford you such extreme rapture, would not be any source of remarkable gratification to me."

Fay looked up at him and laughed.

"Well, I am fond of animals as you are fond of books. Is it not an open question whether the live dog or sheep-skin is not as good as the dead Morocco or Russian leather?"

"Is it an open question, whether Macaulay's or Arago's brain weighs no more than a cat's or a puppy's?"

"Brain!" said impudent little Fay; "are your great men always as honest and as faithful as my poor little Snowdrop? I have an idea that Sheridan's brains were often obscured by brandy; that Richelieu had the weakness to be prouder of his bad poems than his magnificent policies; and that Pope and Byron had the folly to be more tenacious of a glance at their physical defect than an onslaught on their noblest works. I could mention a good many other instances where brain was not always a voucher for corresponding strength of character."

Keane was surprised to hear a sensible speech from this volatile little puss, and honoured her by answering her seriously.

"Say, rather, Miss Morton, that those to whom many temptations fall should have many excuses made. Where the brain preponderates, excelling the creative faculty and rapid thought, there will the sensibilities be proportionately acute. The vivacity and vigorous life which produced the rapid flow of Sheridan's eloquence led him into the dissipation which made him end his days in a spunging-house. Men of cooler minds and natures must not presume to judge him. They had not his temptation; they cannot judge of his fault. Richelieu, in all probability, amused himself with his verses as he amused himself with his white kitten and its cork, as a *délassement;* had he piqued himself upon his poetry as they say, he would have turned poetaster instead of politician. As for the other two, you must remember that Pope's deformity made him a subject of ridicule to the woman he was fool enough to worship, and Byron, poor fellow, was over-susceptible on all points, or he would scarcely have allowed the venomed arrows from the Scotch Reviewers to wound him, nor would he have cared for the desertion of a wife who was to him like ice to fire. When you are older, you will learn that it is very dangerous and unjust to say this thing is right, that wrong, that feeling wise, or this foolish; for all temperaments are different, and the same circumstances may produce very different effects. Your puppies will grow up with dissimilar characters; how much more so, then, must men?"

Miss Fay was quiet for a minute, then she flashed her mischievous eyes on him.

"Certainly; but then, by your own admission, you have no right to decide that your love for mathematics is wise, and my love for Snowdrop foolish; it may be quite *au contraire.* Perhaps, after all, I may have 'chosen the better part.'"

"Fay, go in and dress for dinner," interrupted the General, trotting up; "your tongue would run on for ever if nobody stopped it; you're no exception to your sex on that point. Is she?"

Keane laughed.

"Perhaps Miss Morton's frænum, like Sydie's, was cut too far in her infancy, and therefore she has been 'unbridled' ever since."

"In all things!" cried little Fay. "Nobody has put the curb on me yet, and nobody ever shall."

"Don't be too sure, Fay," cried Sydie. "Rarey does wonders with the wildest fillies. Somebody may bring you down on your knees yet."

"You'll have to see to that, Sydie," laughed the General. "Come, get along, child, to your toilette. I never have my soup cold and my curry overdone. To wait for his dinner is a stretch of good-nature and patience that ought not to be expected of any man."

The soup was not cold nor the curry overdone, and the dinner was pleasant enough, in the long dining-room, with the June sun streaming in through its bay-windows from out the brilliant-coloured garden, and the walls echoing with the laughter of Sydie and his cousin, the young lady keeping true to her avowal of "not caring for Plato's presence." "Plato," however, listened quietly, peeling his peaches with tranquil amusement; for if the girl talked nonsense, it was clever nonsense, as rare, by the way, and quite as refreshing as true wit.

"My gloves are safe; you're too afraid of him, Fay," whispered Sydie, bending forward to give her some hautboys.

"Am I?" cried Miss Fay, with a *moue* of supreme contempt. Neither the whisper nor the *moue* escaped Keane, as he talked with the governor on model drainage.

"Where's my hookah, Fay?" asked the General, after dessert. "Get it, will you, my pet?"

"Voilà!" cried Miss Fay, lifting the narghilé from the sideboard. Then taking some cigars off the mantelpiece, she put one in her own mouth, struck a fusee, and, handing the case to Keane, said, with a saucy smile in her soft bright eyes, though, to tell the truth, she was a little bit afraid of taking liberties with him:

"If you are not above such a sublunary indulgence, will you have a cigar with me?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Keane, with a grave bow; "and if you would like to further rival George Sand, I shall be very happy to give you the address of my tailor."

"Thank you exceedingly; but as long as crinoline is the type of the sex that are a little lower than the angels, and ribbon-ties the seal of those but a trifle better than Mephistopheles, I don't think I will change it," responded Little Fay, contemptuously, as she threw herself down on a couch with an indignant defiant glance, and puffed at her Manilla.

"I *hate* him, Sydie," said the little lady, vehemently, that night.

"Do you, dear," answered the Cantab; "you see, you've never had anybody to be afraid of, or had any man neglect you before."

"He may neglect me if he please, I am sure I do not care," rejoined Fay, disdainfully; "only I do wish, Sydie, that you had never brought him here to make us all uncomfortable."

"He don't make me uncomfortable, quite otherwise; nor yet the governor; you're the only victim, Fay."

Fay saw little enough of Keane for the next week or two. He was out all day with Sydie trout-fishing, or walking over his farms with the General, or sitting in the study reading, and writing his articles for the *Cambridge Journal*, *Leonville's Mathematical Journal*, or the *Westminster Review*. But when she was with him, there was no mischief within her reach that Miss Fay did not perpetrate. Keane, to tease her, would condemn—so seriously that she believed him—all that she loved the best; he would tell her that he admired quiet domestic women; that he thought girls should be very subdued and retiring; that they should work well, and not care much for society; at all of which, being her extreme antipodes, Little Fay would be vehemently wrathful. She would get on her pony without any saddle in her evening dress, and ride him at the five-bar gate in the stable-yard; she would put on Sydie's smoking-cap, and look very pretty in it, and take a Queen's on the divan of the smoking-room, reading *Bell's Life*, and asking Keane how much he would bet on the October; she would spend all the morning making wreaths of roses, dressing herself and the puppies up in them, inquiring if it was not a laudable and industrious occupation. There was no nonsense or mischief Fay would not imagine and forthwith commit, and anything they wanted her not to do she would do straightway, even to the imperilling of her own life and limb. She tried hard to irritate or rouse "Plato," as she called him, but "Plato" was not to be moved, and treated her as a spoilt child, whom he alone had sense enough to resist.

"It will be great folly for you to attempt it, Miss Morton. Those horses are not fit to be driven by any one, much less by a woman," said Keane, quietly, one morning.

They were in the stable-yard, and chanced to be alone when a new purchase of the governor's—two scarcely broken in thorough-bred colts—were brought with a new mail-phaeton into the yard, and Miss Fay forthwith announced her resolution of driving them round the avenue. The groom that came with them told her they were almost more than he could manage, their own coachman begged and implored, Keane reasoned quietly, all to no purpose. The rosebud had put out its little wilful thorns; Keane's words added fuel to fire. Up she sprang, looking the daintiest morsel imaginable perched up on that very exalted box-seat, told the horrified groom to mount behind, and started them off, lifting her hat with a graceful bow to "Plato," who stood watching the phaeton with his arms folded and his cigar in his mouth.

Soon after, he started in the contrary direction, for the avenue circled the Beeches in an oval of four miles, and he knew he should meet her coming back. He strolled along under the pleasant shadow of the great trees, enjoying the sunset and the fresh air, and capable of enjoying them still more but for an inward misgiving. His presentiment was not without its grounds. He had walked about a mile and a-half round the avenue when a cloud of dust told him what was up, and in the distance came the thorough-breds, broken away as he had prophesied, tearing along with the bits between their teeth, Little Fay keeping gallantly hold of the ribbons, but as powerless over the colts, now they had got their heads, as the groom leaning from the back seat.

On came the phaeton, bumping, rattling, oscillating, threatening every second to be turned over. Keane caught one glance of Fay's face, resolute and pale, and of her little hands grasping the ribbons, till they were cut and bleeding with the strain. There was nothing for it but to stand straight in the animals' path, catch their heads, and throw them back on their haunches. Luckily, his muscles were like iron—luckily, too, the colts had come a long way, and were not fresh. He stood like a rock, and checked them; running a very close risk of dislocating his arms with the shock, but saving Little Fay from destruction. The colts stood trembling, the groom jumped out and caught the reins, Keane amused himself silently with the mingled penitence, vexation, shame, and rebellion visible in the little lady's face.

"Well," said he, quietly, "as you were so desirous of breaking your neck, will you ever forgive me for defeating your purpose?"

"Pray don't!" cried Fay, passionately. "I do thank you so much for saving my life; I think it so generous and brave of you to have rescued me at such risk to yourself. I feel that I can never be grateful enough to you, but don't talk in that way. I know it was silly and self-willed of me."

"It was; that fact is obvious."

"Then I shall make it more so," cried Miss Fay, with her old wilfulness. "I do feel very grateful, and I would tell you so, if you would let me; but if you think it has made me afraid, you are quite wrong, and so you shall see."

And before he could interfere, or do more than mechanically spring up after her, she had caught the reins from the groom, and started the trembling colts off again. But Keane put his hand on the ribbons.

"Foolish child; are you mad?" he said, so gravely yet so gently that Fay let them go, and let him drive her back to the stable-yard, where she sprang out, and rushed away to her own room, terrified the governor with a few vehement sentences, which gave him a vague idea that Keane was murdered and both Fay's legs broken, and then had a private cry all to herself, with her arms round Snowdrop's neck, curled up in one of the drawing-room windows, where she had not been long when the General and Keane passed through, not noticing her, hidden as she was in curtains, cushions, and flowers.

"She's a little wilful thing, Keane," the General was saying, "but you mustn't think the worse of her for that."

"I don't. I am sick of those conventional young ladies who agree with everything one says to them—who keep all the frowns for mothers and servants, and are as serene as a cloudless sky abroad, smile blandly on all alike, and haven't an opinion of their own."

"Fay's plenty of opinions of her own," chuckled the General; "and she tells 'em pretty freely, too. Bless the child, she's not ashamed of any of her thoughts, and never will be."

"I hope not. Your little niece can do things that no other young lady could, and they are so pretty in her that it would be a thousand pities for her to grow one atom less natural and wilful. Grapes growing wild are charming—grapes trained to a stake are ruined. I assure you, if I were you, I would not scold her for driving those colts to-day. High spirits and love of fun led her on, and the courage and presence of mind she displayed are too rare among her sex for us to do right in checking them."

"To be sure, to be sure," assented the governor, gleefully. "God bless the child! she's one among a thousand, sir. Cognac, not milk-and-water. There's the dinner-bell; confound it."

Whereat the General made his exit, and Keane also; and Fay kissed the spaniel with even more passionate attachment than ordinary.

"Ah, Snowdrop, I don't hate him any more; he is a darling!"

One glowing August morning Keane was in the study pondering whether he would go to his moor or not. The General had besought him to stay. His gamekeeper wrote him that it was a horridly bad rainy season in Inverness-shire; the trout and the rabbits were very good sport in a mild way here. Altogether, Keane felt half disposed to keep where he was, when a shadow fell across his paper, and, as he looked up, he saw in the open window the English rosebud.

"Is it not one of the open questions, Mr. Keane," asked Fay, "whether it is very wise to spend all this glorious morning shut out of the sight of the sun-rays and the scent of the flowers?"

"How have *you* been spending it, then?"

"Putting bouquets in all the rooms, cleaning my aviary, talking to the puppies, and reading Jocelyn under the limes in the shrubberies—all very puerile, but all very pleasant. Perhaps if you descended to a lazy day like that now and then, you might be none the worse!"

"Is that a challenge? Will you take me under the limes?"

"No, indeed! I do not admit men who despise them to my gardens of Armida, any more than you would admit me into your Schools. I have as great a scorn for a sceptic as you have for a tyro."

"Pardon me. I have no scorn for a tyro. But you would not come to the Academe! you dislike 'Plato' too much."

Fay looked up at him half shyly, half mischievously.

"Yes, I do dislike you, when you look down on me as Richelieu might have looked down on his kitten."

"Liking to see its play?" said Keane, half sadly. "Contrasting its gay insouciance with his own toil and turmoil, regretting, perhaps, the time when trifles made his joy as they did his kitten's? If I were to look on you so, there would not be much to offend you."

"You do not think so of me, or you would speak to me as if I were an intelligent being, not a silly little thing."

"How do you know I think you silly?"

"Because you think all women so."

"Perhaps: but then you should rather try to redeem me from my error in doctrine. Come let us sign a treaty of peace. Take me under the limes. I want some fresh air after writing all day; and in payment I will teach you Euclid, as you vainly beseeched your cousin to do yesterday."

"Will you?" cried Fay, eagerly. Then she threw back her head. "I never am won by bribes."

"Nor yet by threats? What a difficult young lady you are. Come show me your shrubbery sanctum now you have invaded mine."

The English rosebud laid aside its wilful thorns, and Fay, a little less afraid of her Plato, and therefore a little less defiant to him, led him over the grounds, filled his hands with flowers, showed him her aviary, read some of Jocelyn to him, to show him, she said, that Lamartine was better than the Œdipus in Coloneus, and thought, as she dressed for dinner, "I wonder if he does despise me—he has such a beautiful face, if he were not so haughty and cold!"

The next day Keane gave her an hour of Euclid in the study. Certainly the Coach had never had such a pretty pupil; and he wished every dull head he had to cram was as intelligent as this fair-haired one. Fay was quick and clever; she was stimulated, moreover, by his decree concerning the stupidity of all women; she really worked as hard as any young man studying for degrees when they supposed her fast asleep in bed, and she got over the Pons Asinorum in a style that fairly astonished her tutor.

The Coach did not dislike his occupation either; it did him good, after his life of solitude and study, something as the kitten and cork did Richelieu good after his cabinets and councils; and Little Fay, with her flowers and fun, mischief and impudence, and that winning wilfulness which it amused him gradually to tame down, unbent the chillness which had grown upon him. He was the better for it, as a man after hard study or practice is the better for some fresh sea-breezes, and some days of careless dolce.

"Well, Fay, have you had another poor devil flinging himself at your feet by means of a postage-stamp?" said Sydie one morning at breakfast. "You can't disguise anything from me, your most interested, anxious, and near and dear relative. Whenever the governor looks particularly stormy I see the signs of the times, that if I do not forthwith remove your dangerously attractive person, all the bricks, spooneys, swells, and do-nothings in the county will speedily fill the Hanwell wards to overflowing."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Sydie," said Fay, impatiently, with a glance at Keane, as she handed him his chocolate.

"Ah! deuce take the fellows," chuckled the General. Love, devotion, admiration! What a lot of stuff they do write. I wonder, if Fay were a little beggar, how much of it all would stand the test? But we know a trick worth two of that. Try those sardines, Keane. House is let, Fay—eh? House is let; nobody need apply. Ha, ha!"

And the General took some more curry, laughing till he was purple, while Fay blushed scarlet, a trick of which she was rarely guilty; Sydie smiled, and Keane picked out his sardines with calm deliberation.

"Hallo! God bless my soul!" burst forth the General again. "Devil take me! I'll be hanged if I stand it! Confound 'em all! I do call it hard for a man not to be able to sit at his breakfast in peace. Good Heavens! what will come to the country, if all those little devils grow up to be food for Calcraft? He's actually pulling the bark off the trees, as I live! Excuse me, I *can't* sit still and see it."

Wherewith the General bolted from his chair, darted through the window, upsetting three dogs, two kittens, and a stand of flowers in his exit, and bolted breathlessly across the park with the poker in his hand.

"Bless his old heart! Ain't he a brick?" shouted Sydie. "Do excuse me, Fay, I must go and hear him blow up that boy sky-high, and give him a shilling for tuck afterwards; it will be so rich."

The Cantab made his exit, and Fay busied herself calming the kittens' minds, and restoring the dethroned geraniums. Keane read his *Times* for ten minutes, then looked up.

"Miss Morton, where is your tongue? I have not heard it for a quarter of an hour, a miracle that has never happened in the two months I have been at the Beeches."

"You do not want to hear it."

"What! am I in *mauvais odeur* again?" smiled Keane. "I thought we were good friends. Have you found the Q.E.D. to the problem I gave you?"

"To be sure!" cried Fay, exultantly. And kneeling down by him, she went through the whole thing in exceeding triumph.

"You are a good child," said her tutor, smiling, in himself amazed at this volatile little thing's capacity for mathematics. "I think you will be able to take your degree, if you like. Come, do you hate me now, Fay?"

"No," said Fay, a little shyly. "I never hated you, I always admired you; but I was afraid of you, though I would never confess it to Sydie."

"Never be afraid of me," said Keane, putting his hand on hers as it lay on the arm of his chair. "You have no cause. You can do things few girls can; but they are pretty in you, where they might be—not so pretty in others. *I* like them at the least. You are very fond of your cousin, are you not?"

"Of Sydie? Oh, I love him dearly!"

Keane took his hand away, and rose, as the General trotted in:

"God bless my soul, Keane, how warm it is! Confoundedly hot without one's hat, I can tell you. Had my walk all for nothing, too. That cursed little idiot wasn't trespassing after all. Stephen had set him to spud out the daisies, and I'd thrashed the boy before I'd listen to him. Devil take him!"

August went out and September came in, and Keane stayed on at the Beeches. They were pleasant days to them all, knocking over the partridges right and left, enjoying a cold luncheon under the luxuriant hedges, and going home for a dinner, full of laughter, and talk, and good cookery; and

Fay's songs afterwards, as wild and sweet in their way as a goldfinch's on a hawthorn spray.

"You like Little Fay, don't you, Keane?" said the General, as they went home one evening.

Keane looked startled for a second.

"Of course," he said, rather haughtily. "That Miss Morton is very charming every one must admit."

"Bless her little heart! She's a wild little filly, Keane; but she'll go better and truer than your quiet broken-in ones, who wear the harness so respectably, and are so wicked and vicious in their minds. And what do you think of my boy?" asked the General, pointing to Sydie, who was in front. "How does he stand at Cambridge?"

"Sydie? Oh, he's a nice young fellow. He is a great favourite there, and he is—the best things he can be—generous, sweet-tempered, and honourable——"

"To be sure," echoed the General, rubbing his hands. "He's a dear boy—a very dear boy. They're both exactly all I wished them to be, dear children; and I must say I am delighted to see 'em carrying out the plan I had always made for 'em from their childhood."

"Being what, General, may I ask?"

"Why, any one can see, as plain as a pikestaff, that they're in love with each other," said the General, glowing with satisfaction; "and I mean them to be married and happy. They dote on each other, Keane, and I shan't put any obstacles in their way. Youth's short enough, Heaven knows; let 'em enjoy it, say I, it don't come back again. Don't say anything to him about it; I want to have some fun with him. They've settled it all, of course, long ago; but he hasn't confided in me, the sly dog. Trust an old campaigner, though, for twigging an *affaire de cœur.* Bless them both, they make me feel a boy again. We'll have a gay wedding, Keane; mind you come down for it. I dare say it'll be at Christmas."

Keane walked along, drawing his cap over his eyes. The sun was setting full in his face.

"Well, what sport?" cried Fay, running up to them.

"Pretty fair," said Keane, coldly, as he passed her.

It was an hour before the dinner-bell rang. Then he came down cold and calm, particularly brilliant in conversation, more courteous, perhaps, to her than ever, but the frost had gathered round him that the sunny atmosphere of the Beeches had melted; and Fay, though she tried to tease, and to coax, and to win him, could not dissipate it. She felt him an immeasurable distance from her again. He was a learned, haughty, grave philosopher, and she a little naughty child.

As Keane went up-stairs that night, he heard Sydie talking in the hall.

"Yes, my worshipped Fay, I shall be intensely and utterly miserable away from the light of your eyes; but, nevertheless, I must go and see Kingslake from John's next Tuesday, because I've promised; and let one idolise your divine self ever so much, one can't give up one's larks, you know."

Keane ground his teeth with a bitter sigh and a fierce oath.

"Little Fay, I would have loved you more tenderly than that!"

He went in and threw himself on his bed, not to sleep. For the first time for many years he could not summon sleep at his will. He had gone on petting her and amusing himself, thinking of her only as a winning, wayward child. Now he woke with a shock to discover, too late, that she had stolen from him unawares the heart he had so long refused to any woman. With his high intellect and calm philosophy, after his years spent in severe science and cold solitude, the hot well-springs of passion had broken loose again. He longed to take her bright life into his own grave and cheerless one; he longed to feel her warm young heart beat with his own, icebound for so many years; but Little Fay was never to be his.

In the bedroom next to him the General sat, with his feet in his slippers and his dressing-gown round him, smoking his last cheroot before a roaring fire, chuckling complacently over his own thoughts.

"To be sure, we'll have a very gay wedding, such as the county hasn't seen in all its blessed days," he muttered, with supreme satisfaction. "Sydie shall have this place. What do I want with a great town of a house like this, big enough for a barrack? I'll take that shooting-box that's to let four miles off; that'll be plenty large enough for me and my old chums to smoke in and chat over bygone times, and it will do our hearts good—freshen us up a bit to see those young things enjoying themselves. My Little Fay will be the prettiest bride that ever was seen. Silly young things to suppose I don't see through them. Trust an old soldier! However, love is blind, they say. How could they have helped falling in love with one another? and who'd have the heart to part 'em, I should like to know?"

Keane stayed that day: the next, receiving a letter which afforded a true though a slight excuse to return to Cambridge, he went, the General, Fay, and Sydie believing him gone only for a few days, he knowing that he would never set foot in the Beeches again. He went back to his rooms, whose dark monastic gloom in the dull October day seemed to close round him like an iron shroud. Here, with his books, his papers, his treasures of intellect, science and art, his "mind a kingdom" to him, he had spent many a happy day, with his brain growing only clearer and clearer as he followed out a close reasoning or clenched a subtle analysis. Now, for the sake of a mischievous child but half his age, he shuddered as he entered.

"Well, my dear boy," began the General one day after dinner, "I've seen your game, though you thought I didn't. How do you know, you young dog, that I shall give my consent?"

"Oh, bother, governor, I know you will," cried Sydie, aghast; "because, you see, if you let me have a few cool hundreds I can give the men such slap-up wines—and it's my last year, General."

"You sly dog!" chuckled the governor, "I'm not talking of your wine-merchant, and you know I'm not, Master Sydie. It's no good playing hide-and-seek with me; I can always see through a millstone when Cupid is behind it; and there's no need to beat round the bush with me, my boy. I never gave my assent to anything with greater delight in my life; I've always meant you to marry Fay, and——"

"Marry Fay!" shouted Sydie. "Good Heavens! governor, what next?" And the Cantab threw himself back and laughed till he cried, and Snowdrop and her pups barked furiously in a concert of excited sympathy.

"Why, sir, why?—why, because—devil take you, Sydie—I don't know what you are laughing at, do you?" cried the General, starting out of his chair.

"Yes, I do, governor; you're labouring under a most delicious delusion."

"Delusion!—eh?—what? Why, bless my soul, I don't think you know what you are saying, Sydie?" stormed the General.

"Yes, I do; you've an idea—how you got it into your head Heaven knows, but there it is—you've an idea that Fay and I are in love with one another; and I assure you you were never more mistaken in your life."

Seeing the General standing bolt upright staring at him, and looking decidedly apoplectic, Sydie made the matter a little clearer.

"Fay and I would do a good deal to oblige you, my beloved governor, if we could get up the steam a little, but I'm afraid we really can *not.* Love ain't in one's own hands, you see, but a skittish mare, that gets her head, and takes the bit between her teeth, and bolts off with you wherever she likes. Is it possible that two people who broke each other's toys, and teased each other's lives out, and caught the measles of each other, from their cradle upwards, should fall in love with each other when they grow up? Besides, I don't intend to marry for the next twenty years, if I can help it. I couldn't afford a milliner's bill to my tailor's, and I should be ruined for life if I merged my bright particular star of a self into a respectable, lark-shunning, bill-paying, shabby-hatted family man. Good Heavens, what a train of horrors comes with the bare idea!"

"Do you mean to say, sir, you won't marry your cousin?" shouted the General.

"Bless your dear old heart, *no,* governor—ten times over, *no!* I wouldn't marry anybody, not for half the universe."

"Then I've done with you, sir—I wash my hands of you!" shouted the General, tearing up and down the room in a quick march, more beneficial to his feelings than his carpet. "You are an ungrateful, unprincipled, shameless young man, and are no more worthy of the affection and the interest I've been fool enough to waste on you than a tom-cat. You're an abominably selfish, ungrateful, unnatural boy; and though you *are* poor Phil's son, I will tell you my mind, sir; and I must say I think your conduct with your cousin, making love to her—desperate love to her—winning her affections, poor unhappy child, and then making a jest of her and treating it with a laugh, is disgraceful, sir—*disgraceful,* do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear, General," cried Sydie, convulsed with laughter; "but Fay cares no more for me than for those geraniums. We are fond of one another, in a cool, cousinly sort of way, but——"

"Hold your tongue!" stormed the General. "Don't dare to say another word to me about it. You know well enough that it has been the one delight of my life, and if you'd had any respect or right feeling in you, you'd marry her to-morrow."

"She wouldn't be a party to that. Few women *are* blind to my manifold attractions; but Fay's one of 'em. Look here, governor," said Sydie, laying his hand affectionately on the General's shoulder, "did it never occur to you that though the pretty castle's knocked down, there may be much nicer bricks left to build a new one? Can't you see that Fay doesn't care two buttons about me, but cares a good many diamond studs about somebody else?"

"Nothing has occurred to me but that you and she are two heartless, selfish, ungrateful chits. Hold your tongue, sir!"

"But, General——"

"Hold your tongue, sir; don't talk to me I tell you. In love with somebody else? I should like to see him show his face here. Somebody she's talked to for five minutes at a race-ball, and proposed to her in a corner, thinking to get some of my money. Some swindler, or Italian refugee, or blackleg, I'd be bound—taken her in, made her think him an angel, and will persuade her to run away with him. I'll set the police round the house—I'll send her to school in Paris. What fools men are to have anything to do with women at all! You seem in their confidence; who's the fellow?"

"A man very like a swindler or a blackleg—Keane!"

"Keane!" shouted the General, pausing in the middle of his frantic march.

"Keane," responded Sydie.

"Keane!" shouted the General again. "God bless my soul, she might as well have fallen in love with the man in the moon. Why couldn't she like the person I had chosen for her?"

"If one can't guide the mare oneself, 'tisn't likely the governors can for one," muttered Sydie.

"Poor dear child! fallen in love with a man who don't care a button for her, eh! Humph!—that's always the way with women—lose the good chances, and fling themselves at a man's feet who cares no more for their tomfoolery of worship than he cares for the blacking on his boots. Devil take young people, what a torment they are! The ungrateful little jade, how dare she go and smash all my plans like that! and if I ever set my heart on anything, I set it on that match. Keane! he'll no more love anybody than the stone cherubs on the terrace. He's a splendid head, but his heart's every atom as cold as granite. Love her? Not a bit of it. When I told him you were going to marry her (I thought you would, and so you will, too, if you've the slightest particle of gratitude or common sense in either of you), he listened as quietly and as calmly as if he had been one of the men in armour in the hall. Love, indeed! To the devil with love, say I! It's the head and root of everything that is mischievous and bad."

"Wait a bit, uncle," cried Sydie; "you told him all about your precious match-making, eh! And didn't he go off like a shot two days after, when we meant him to stay on a month longer? Can't you put two and two together, my once wide-awake governor? 'Tisn't such a difficult operation."

"No, I can't!" shouted the General; "I don't know anything, I don't see anything, I don't believe in anything, I hate everybody and everything, I tell you; and I'm a great fool for having ever set my heart on any plan that wanted a woman's concurrence—

For if she will she will, you may depend on't,
And if she won't she won't, and there's an end on't."

Wherewith the General stuck his wide-awake on fiercely, and darted out by the bay-window to cool himself. Half way across the lawn, he turned sharp round, and came back again.

"Sydie, do you fancy Keane cares a straw for that child?"

"I can't say. It's possible."

"Humph! Well, can't you go and see? That's come of those mathematical lessons. What a fool I was to allow her to be so much with him!" growled the General, with many grunts and half-audible oaths, swinging round again, and trotting through the window as hot and peppery as his own idolised curry.

Keane was sitting writing in his room at King's some few days after. The backs looked dismal with their leafless, sepia-coloured trees; the streets were full of sloppy mud and dripping under-grads' umbrellas; his own room looked sombre and dark, without any sunshine on his heavy oak bookcases, and massive library-table, and dark bronzes. His pen moved quickly, his head was bent over the paper, his mouth sternly set, and his forehead paler and more severe than ever. The gloom in his chambers had gathered round him himself, when his door was burst open, and Sydie dashed in and threw himself down in a green leather arm-chair.

"Well, sir, here am I back again. Just met the V.P. in the quad, and he was so enchanted at seeing me, that he kissed me on both cheeks, flung off his gown, tossed up his cap, and performed a *pas d'extase* on the spot. Isn't it delighful to be so beloved? Granta looks very delicious to-day, I must say—about as refreshing and lively as an acidulated spinster going district-visiting in a snow-storm. And how are you, most noble lord?"

"Pretty well."

"Only that? Thought you were all muscle and iron. I say, what *do* you think the governor has been saying to me?"

"How can I tell?"

"Tell! No, I should not have guessed it if I'd tried for a hundred years! By George! nothing less than that I should marry Fay. What do you think of that, sir?"

Keane traced Greek unconsciously on the margin of his *Times*. For the life of him, with all his self-command, he could not have answered.

"Marry Fay! *I!*" shouted Sydie. "Ye gods, what an idea! I never was so astonished in all my days. Marry Little Fay!—the governor must be mad, you know."

"You will not marry your cousin?" asked Keane, tranquilly, though the rapid glance and involuntary start did not escape Sydie's quick eyes.

"Marry! I! By George, no! She wouldn't have me, and I'm sure I wouldn't have her. She is a dear little monkey, and I'm very fond of her, but I wouldn't put the halter round my neck for any woman going. I don't like vexing the General, but it would be really too great a sacrifice merely to oblige him."

"She cares nothing for you, then?"

"Nothing? Well, I don't know. Yes, in a measure, she does. If I should be taken home on a hurdle one fine morning, she'd shed some cousinly tears over my inanimate body; but as for *the other thing*, not one bit of it. 'Tisn't likely. We're a great deal too like one another, too full of devilry and carelessness, to assimilate. Isn't it the delicious contrast and fiz of the sparkling acid of divine lemons with the contrariety of the fiery spirit of beloved rum that makes the delectable union known and worshipped in our symposia under the blissful name of PUNCH? Marry Little Fay! By Jove, if all the governor's match-making was founded on no better reasons for success, it is a small marvel that he's a bachelor now! By George it's time for hall!"

And the Cantab took himself off, congratulating himself on the adroit manner in which he had cut the Gordian knot that the General had muddled up so inexplicably in his unpropitious match-making.

Keane lay back in his chair some minutes, very still; then he rose to dine in hall, pushing away his books and papers, as if throwing aside with them a dull and heavy weight. The robins sang in the leafless backs, the sun shone out on the sloppy streets; the youth he thought gone for ever was come back to him. Oh, strange stale story of Hercules and Omphale, old as the hills, and as eternal! Hercules goes on in his strength slaying his Hydra and his Laomedon for many years, but he comes at last, whether he like it or not, to his Omphale, at whose feet he is content to sit and spin long golden threads of pleasure and of passion, while his lion's skin is moth-eaten and his club rots away.

Little Fay sat curled up on the study hearth-rug, reading a book her late guest had left behind him—a very light and entertaining volume, being Delolme "On the Constitution," but which she preferred, I suppose, to "What Will He Do With It?" or the "Feuilles d'Automne," for the sake of that clear autograph, "Gerald Keane, King's Coll.," on its fly-leaf. A pretty picture she made, with her handsome spaniels; and she was so intent on what she was reading—the fly-leaf, by the way—that she never heard the opening of the door, till a hand drew away her book. Then Fay started up, oversetting the puppies one after another, radiant and breathless.

Keane took her hands and drew her near him.

"You do not hate me now, then?"

Fay put her head on one side with her old wilfulness.

"Yes I do—when you go away without any notice, and hardly bid me good-bye. You would not have left one of your men pupils so unceremoniously."

Keane smiled involuntarily, and drew her closer.

"If you do not hate me, will you go a step farther—and love me? Little Fay, my own darling, will you come and brighten my life? It has been a saddened and a stern one, but it shall never throw a shade on yours."

The wild little filly was conquered—at least, she came to hand docile and subdued, and acknowledged her master. She loved him, and told him so with that frankness and fondness which would have covered faults far more glaring and weighty than Little Fay's.

"But you must never be afraid of me," whispered Keane, some time after.

"Oh no."

"And you do not wish Sydie had never brought me here to make you all uncomfortable."

"Oh, please don't!" cried Fay, plaintively. "I was a child then, and I did not know what I said."

"'Then,' being three months ago, may I ask what you are now?"

"A child still in knowledge, but *your* child," whispered Fay, lifting her face to his, "to be petted and spoiled, and never found fault with, remember!"

"My little darling, who would have the heart to find fault with you, whatever your sins?"

"God bless my soul, what's this?" cried a voice in the doorway.

There stood the General in wide-awake and shooting-coat, with a spade in one hand and a watering-pot in the other, too astonished to keep his amazement to himself. Fay would fain have turned and fled, but Keane smiled, kept one arm round her, and stretched out his hand to the governor.

"General, I came once uninvited, and I am come again. Will you forgive me? I have a great deal to say to you, but I must ask you one question first of all. Will you give me your treasure?"

"Eh! humph! What? Well—I suppose—yes," ejaculated the General, breathless from the combined effects of amazement and excessive and vehement gardening. "But bless my soul, Keane, I should as soon have thought of one of the stone cherubs, or that bronze Milton; never mind, one lives and learns. Mind; devil take me, what am I talking about?

I don't mind at all; I'm very happy, only I'd set my heart on—you know what. More fool I. Fay, you little imp, come here. Are you fairly broken in by Keane, then?"

"Yes," said Miss Fay, with her old mischief, but a new blush, "as he has promised never to use the curb."

"God bless you, then, my little pet," cried the General, kissing her some fifty times. Then he laughed till he cried, and dried his eyes and laughed again, and grunted and growled, and shook both Keane's hands vehemently. "I was a great fool, sir, and I dare say you've managed much better. I *did* set my heart on the boy, you know, but it can't be helped now, and I don't wish it should. Be kind to her, that's all; for though she mayn't bear the curb, the whip from anybody she cares about would break her heart. She's a dear child, Keane—a very dear child. Be kind to her, that's all."

On the evening of January 13th, beginning the Lent Term, Mr. Sydenham Morton sat in his own rooms with half a dozen spirits like himself, a delicious aroma surrounding them of Maryland and rum-punch, and a rapid flow of talk making its way through the dense atmosphere.

"To think of Granite Keane being caught!" shouted one young fellow; "I should as soon have thought of the Pyramids walking over to the Sphinx, and marrying her."

"Poor devil! I pity him," sneered Henley of Trinity, aged nineteen.

"He don't require much pity, my dear fellow; I think he's pretty comfortable," rejoined Sydie. "He did, to be sure, when he was trying to beat sense into your brain-box, but that's over for the present."

"Come tell us about the wedding," said Somerset of King's. "I was so sorry I couldn't go down."

"Well," began Sydie, stretching his legs and putting down his pipe, "she—*the* she was dressed in white tulle and——"

"Bother the dress. Go ahead!"

"The dress was no bother, it was the one subject in life to the women. You must listen to the dress, because I asked the prettiest girl there for the description of it to enlighten your minds, and it was harder to learn than six books of Horace. The bridesmaids wore tarlatane à la Princesse Stéphanie, trois jupes bouillonnées, jupe dessous de soie glacée, guirlandes couleur des yeux impériaux d'Eugénie, corsets décolletés garnis de ruches de ruban du——"

"For Heaven's sake, hold your tongue!" cried Somerset, "that jargon's worse than the Yahoos'. The dead languages are bad enough to learn, but women's living language of fashion is ten hundred times worse. The twelve girls were dressed in blue and white, and thought themselves angels—we understand. Cut along."

"Gunter was prime," continued Sydie, "and the governor was prime, too—splendid old buck: only when he gave her away he was very near saying, 'Devil take it!' which might have had a novel, but hardly a solemn effect. Little Fay was delightful—for all the world like a bit of incarnated sunshine. Keane was granite all over, except his eyes, and they were lava; if we hadn't, for our own preservation, let him put her in a carriage and started 'em off, he might have become dangerous, after the manner of Etna, ice outside and red-hot coals within. The bridesmaids' tears must have washed the church for a week, and made it rather a damp affair. One would scarcely think women were so anxious to marry, to judge from the amount of grief they get up at a friend's sacrifice. It looks uncommonly like envy; but it *isn't*, we're sure! The ball was like most other balls: alternate waltzing and flirtation, a vast lot of nonsense talked, and a vast lot of champagne drunk—Cupid running about in every direction, and a tremendous run on all the amatory poets—Browning and Tennyson being worked as hard as cab-horses, and used up pretty much as those quadrupeds—dandies suffering self-inflicted torture from tight boots, and saying like Cranmer, when he held his hand in the fire, that it was rather agreeable than otherwise, considering it drew admiration—spurs getting entangled in ladies' dresses, and ladies making use thereof for a display of amiability, which the dragoons are very much mistaken if they fancied continued into private life—girls believing all the pretty things said to them—men going home and laughing at them all—wallflowers very black, women engaged ten deep very sunshiny—the governor very glorious, and my noble self very fascinating. And now," said Sydie, taking up his pipe, "pass the punch, old boy, and never say I can't talk!"

THE STORY OF A CRAYON-HEAD;

OR,

A DOUBLED-DOWN LEAF IN A MAN'S LIFE.

I WAS dining with a friend, in his house on the Lung' Arno (he fills, never mind what post in the British Legation), where I was passing an autumn month. The night was oppressively hot; a still, sultry sky brooded over the city, and the stars shining out from a purple mist on to the Campanile near, and the slopes of Bellosguardo in the distance. It was intensely hot; not all the iced wines on his table could remove the oppressive warmth of the evening air, which made both him and me think of evenings we had spent together in the voluptuous lassitude of the East, in days gone by, when we had travelled there, fresh to life, to new impressions, to all that gives "greenness to the grass, and glory to the flower."

The Arno ran on under its bridge, and we leaned out of the balcony where we were sitting and smoking, while I tossed over, without thinking much of what I was doing, a portfolio of his sketches. Position has lost for art many good artists since Sir George Beaumont: my friend is one of them; his sketches are masterly; and had he been a vagrant Bohemian instead of an English peer, there might have been pictures on the walls of the R.A. to console one for the meretricious daubs and pet vulgarities of nursery episodes, hideous babies, and third-class carriage interiors, which make one's accustomed annual visit to the rooms that once saw the beauties of Reynolds, and Wilson, and Lawrence, a positive martyrdom to anybody of decent refinement and educated taste. The portfolio stood near me, and I took out a sketch or two now and then between the pauses of our conversation, looking lazily up the river, while the moonlight shone on Dante's city, that so long forgot, and has, so late, remembered him.

"Ah! what a pretty face this is! Who's the original?" I asked him, drawing out a female head, done with great finish in pastel, under which was written, in his own hand, "Florelle." It was a face of great beauty, with a low Greek brow and bronze-dark hair, and those large, soft, liquid eyes that you only see in a Southern, and that looked at you from the sketch with an earnest, wistful regard, half childlike, half impassioned. He looked up, glanced at the sketch, and stretched out his hand hastily, but I held it away from him. "I want to look at it; it is a beautiful head; I wish we had the original here now. Who is she?"

As I spoke—holding the sketch up where the light from the room within fell on what I had no doubt was a likeness of some fair face that had beguiled his time in days gone by, a souvenir of one of his loves more lasting than souvenirs of such episodes often are, if merely trusted to that inconstant capricieuse, Memory—I might have hit him with a bullet rather than asked him about a mere *étude à deux crayons*, for he shuddered, and drank off some white Hermitage quickly.

"I had forgotten that was in the portfolio," he said, hurriedly, as he took it from me and put it behind him, with its face against the wall, as though it had been the sketch of a Medusa.

"What do you take it away for? I had not half done looking at it. Who is the original?"

"One I don't care to mention."

"Because?"

"Because the sight of that picture gives me a twinge of what I ought to be hardened against—regret."

"Regret! Is any woman worth that?"

"She was."

"I don't believe it; and I fancied you and I thought alike on such points. Of all the women for whom we feel twinges of conscience or self-reproach in melancholy moments, how many *loved us?* Moralists and poets sentimentalise over it, and make it a stalking-horse whereby to magnify our sins and consign us more utterly to perdition, while they do for themselves a little bit of poetic morality cheaply; but in reality there are uncommonly few women who can love, to begin with, and in the second, vanity, avarice, jealousy, desires for pretty toilettes, one or other, or all combined, have quite as much to do with their 'sacrifice' for us as anything."

"Quite true; but—there are women and women, perhaps, and it was not of that sort of regret that I spoke."

"Of what sort then?"

He made me no reply: he broke the ash off his Manilla, and smoked silently some moments, leaning over the balcony and watching the monotonous flow of the Arno, with deeper gloom on his face than I remembered to have seen there any time before. I was sorry I had chanced to light upon a sketch that had brought him back such painful recollections of whatever kind they might be, and I smoked too, sending the perfumed tobacco out into the still sultry night that was brooding over Florence.

"Of what sort?" said he, abruptly, after some minutes' pause. "Shall I tell you? Then you can tell *me* whether I was a fool who made one grand mistake, or a sensible man of the world who kept himself from a grand folly. I have been often in doubt myself."

He leaned back, his face in shadow, so that I could not see it, while the Arno's ebb and flow was making mournful river-music under our windows;—the purple glories of the summer night deepened round Giotto's Tower, where, in centuries past, the Immortal of Florence had sat dreaming of the Paradiso, the mortals passing by whispering him as "the man who had seen hell;" and the light within the room shone on the olives and grapes, the cut glass and silver claret-jugs, the crimson Montepulciano and the white Hermitage, on the table, as he told me the story of the head in crayons.

"Two years ago I went into the south of France. I was Chargé d'Affaires at —— then, you remember, and the climate had told upon me. I was not over well, and somebody recommended me the waters of Eaux Bonnes. The waters I put little faith in, but in the air of the Pyrenees, in the change from diplomacy to a life *en rase campagne*, I put much, and I went to Eaux Bonnes accordingly, for July and August, with a vow to forswear any society I might find at the baths—I had had only too much of society as it was—and to spend my days in the mountains with my sketching-block and my gun. But I did not like Eaux Bonnes; it was intensely warm. There were several people who knew me really; no end of others who got hold of my name, and wanted me to join their riding parties, and balls, and picnics. That was not what *I* wanted, so I left the place and went to Luz, hoping to find solitude there. That valley of Luz—you know it?—is it not as lovely as any artist's dream of Arcadia, in the evening, when the sunset light has passed off the meadows and corn-lands of the lower valley, and just lingers golden and rosy on the crests of the mountains, while the glowworms are coming out among the grasses, and the lights are being lit in the little homesteads nestling among their orchards one above another on the hill-sides, and its hundred streams are rushing down the mountains and under the trees, foaming, and tumbling, and rejoicing on their way! When I have had my fill of ambition and of pleasure, I shall go and live at Luz, I think."

"*When!*"

"Well! you are quite right to repeat it ironically; that time will never come, I dare say, and why should it? I am not the stuff to cogitate away my years in country solitudes. If prizes are worth winning, they are worth working for till one's death; a man should never give up the field while he has life left in him. Well! I went to Luz, and spent a pleasant week or so there, knocking over a few chamois or izards, or sketching on the sides of the Pic du Midi, or Tourmalet, but chiefly lying about under the great beech-trees in the shade, listening to the tinkle of the sheep-bells, like an idle fellow, as I meant to be for the time I had allotted myself. One day——"

He stopped and blew some whiffs from his Manilla into the air. He seemed to linger over the prelude to his story, and shrink from going on with the story itself, I thought; and he smothered a sigh as he raised himself.

"How warm the night is; we shall have a tempest. Reach me that wine, there's a good fellow. No, not the Amontillado, the Château Margaux, please; one can't drink hot dry wines such a night as this. But to satisfy your curiosity about this crayon study.—One day I thought I would go to Gavarnie. I had heard a good deal, of course, about the great marble wall, and the mighty waterfalls, the rocks of Marboré, and the Brêche de Roland, but, as it chanced, I had never been up to the Cercle, nor, indeed, in that part of the Midi at all, so I went. The gods favoured me, I remember: there were no mists, the sun was brilliant, and the great amphitheatre was for once unobscured; the white marble flashing brown and purple, rose and golden, in the light; the cascades tumbling and leaping down into the gigantic basin; the vast plains of snow glittering in the sunshine; the twin rocks standing in the clear air, straight and fluted as any two Corinthian columns hewn and chiselled by man. Good Heaven! before a scene like Gavarnie, what true artist must not fling away his colours and his brushes in despair and disgust with his own puerility and impotence? What can be transferred to canvas of such a scene as that? What does the best beauty of Claude, the grandest sublimity of Salvator, the greatest power of Poussin, look beside Nature when she reigns as she reigns at Gavarnie? I am an art worshipper, as you know: but there are times in my life, places on earth, that make me ready to renounce art for ever!

"The day was beautiful, and thinking I knew the country pretty well, I took no guides. I hate them when I can possibly dispense with them. But the mist soon swooped down over the Cercle, and I began to wish I had one when I turned my horse's head back again. You know the route, of course? Through the Chaos—Heaven knows it is deserving of its name;—down the break-neck little bridle-path, along the Gave, and over the Scia bridge to St. Sauveur. You know it? Then you know that it is much easier to break your neck down it than to find your way by it, though by some hazard I did not break my neck, nor the animal's knees either, but managed to get over the bridge without falling into the torrent, and to pick my way safely down into more level ground; once there, I thought I should easily enough find my way to St. Sauveur, but I was mistaken: the mist had spread over the valley, a heavy storm had come up, and somehow or other I lost the way, and could not tell where I was, whether St. Sauveur was to the left or the right, behind me or in front of me.

The horse, a miserable little Pyrenean beast, was too frightened by the lightning to take the matter into his hands as he had done on the road through the Chaos, and I saw nothing for it but to surrender and come to grief in any way the elements best pleased; swearing at myself for not having stayed at the inn at Gavarnie or Gedre; wishing myself at the vilest mountain auberge that ever sheltered men and mules pêle-mêle; and calling myself hard names for not having listened to my landlady's dissuasions of that morning as I left her door, from my project of going to Gavarnie without a guide, which seemed to her the acme of all she had ever known or heard of English strangers' fooleries. The storm only increased, the great black rocks echoing the roll of the thunder, and the Gave lashing itself into fury in its narrow bed; happily I was on decently level ground, and the horse being, I suppose, tolerably used to storms like it, I pushed him on at last, by dint of blows and conjurations combined, to where, in the flashes of the lightning, I saw what looked to me like the outline of a homestead: it stood in a cleft between two shelving sides of rock, and a narrow bridle-path led up to it, through high yews and a tangled wilderness of rhododendrons, boxwood, and birch—one of those green slopes, so common in the Pyrenees, that look in full sunlight doubly bright and Arcadian-like, from the contrast of the dark, bare, perpendicular rocks that shut them in. I could see but little of its beauty then in the fog that shrouded both it and me, but I saw the shape and semblance of a house, and urging the horse up the ascent, thundered on its gate-panels with my whip-handle till the rocks round echoed.

"There was no answer, and I knocked a little louder, if possible, than before. I was wet to the skin with that wretched storm, and swore not mildly at the inhospitable roof that would not admit me under it. I knocked again, inclined to pick up a bit of granite and beat the panel in; and at last a face—an old woman's weather-beaten face, but with black Southern eyes that had lost little of their fire with age—looked through a grating at me and asked me what I wanted.

"'I want shelter if you can give it me,' I answered her. 'I have lost my way coming from Gavarnie, and am drenched through. I will pay you liberally if you will give an asylum till the weather clears.'

"Her eyes blazed like coals through the little grille.

"'M'sieu, we take no money here—have you mistaken it for an inn? Come in if you want shelter, in Heaven's name! The Holy Virgin forbid we should refuse refuge to any!'

"And she crossed herself and uttered some conjurations to Mary to protect them from all wolves in sheep's clothing, and guard their dwellings from all harm, by which I suppose she thought I spoke fairly and looked harmless, but might possibly be a thief or an assassin, or both in one. She unlocked the gate, and calling to a boy to take my horse into a shed, admitted me under a covered passage-way into the house, which looked like part, and a very ruined part, too, of what had probably been, in the times of Henri Quatre and his grandfather, a feudal château fenced by natural ramparts from the rocks that surrounded it, shutting in the green slope on which it stood, with only one egress, the pass through which I had ascended, into the level plain below. She marshalled me through this covered way into an interior passage, dark and vaulted, cheerless enough, and opened a low oak door, ushering me into a chamber, bare, gloomy, yet with something of lost grandeur and past state lingering about its great hearth, its massive walls, its stained windows, and its ragged tapestry hangings. The woman went up to one of the windows and spoke with a gentleness to which I should have never thought her voice could have been attuned with its harsh patois.

"'Mon enfant, v'lá un m'sieu étranger qui vient chercher un abri pour un petit peu. Veux-tu lui parler?'

"The young girl she spoke to turned, rose, and, coming forward, bade me welcome with the grace, simplicity, and the naïve freedom from embarrassment of a child, looking up in my face with her soft clear eyes. She was like——. No matter! you have seen that crayon-head, it is but a bad portrayal of a face whose expression Raphael and Sassoferrato themselves would have failed to render in its earnest, innocent, elevated regard. She was very young—

Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet—
Womanhood and childhood fleet.

Good Heavens, I am quoting poetry! what will you think of me, to have gone back to the Wertherian and Tennysonian days so far as to repeat a triplet of Longfellow's? No man quotes *those* poets after his salad days, except in a moment of weakness. Caramba! why *has* one any weaknesses at all? we ought not to have any; we live in an atmosphere that would kill them all if they were not as obstinate and indestructible as all other weeds whose seeds will linger and peer up and spoil the ground, let one root them out ever so! I owed you an apology for that lapse into Longfellow, and I have made it. Am I to go on with this story?"

He laughed as he spoke, and his laugh was by no means heartfelt. I told him to go on, and he lighted another Manilla and obeyed me, while the Arno murmured on its way, and the dusky, sultry clouds brooded nearer the earth, and the lights were lit in the distant windows of the palace of the Marchese Acqua d'Oro, that fairest of Florentines, who rouges so indiscriminately and flirts her fan so inimitably, to one of whose balls we were going that night.

He settled himself back in his chair, with his face darkened again by the shadow cast on it from the pillar of the balcony; and took his cigar out of his mouth.

"She looked incongruous in that bare and gloomy room, out of place with it, and out of keeping with the old woman—a French peasant woman, weather-beaten and bronzed, such as you see any day by the score riding to market or sitting knitting at their cottage doors. It was impossible that the girl could be either daughter or grand-daughter, or any relation at all to her. In that room she looked more as one of these myrtles might do, set down in the stifling gloomy horrors of a London street than anything else, save that in certain traces about the chamber, as I told you, there were relics of a faded grandeur which harmonised better with her. I can see her now, as she stood there with a strange foreign grace, an indescribable patrician delicacy mingled with extreme youthfulness and naïveté, like an old picture in costume, like one of Raphael's child-angels in face—poor little Florelle!

"'You would stay till the storm is over, monsieur? you are welcome to shelter if you will,' she said, coming forward to me timidly yet frankly. 'Cazot tells me you are a stranger, and our mountain storms are dangerous if you have no guide.'

"I did not know who Cazot was, but I presumed her to be the old woman who seemed to be porteress, mistress, domestic, cameriste, and all else in her single person, but I thanked her for her permitted shelter, and accepted her invitation to remain till the weather had cleared, as you can imagine. When you have lost your way any asylum is grateful, however desolate and tumble-down. They made me welcome, she and the old peasant woman, with that simple, unrestrained, unostentatious hospitality which is after all the true essence of good breeding, and of which your parvenu knows nothing, when he keeps you waiting, and shows you that you are come at an inapropos moment, in his fussy fear lest everything should not be *comme il faut* to do due credit to *him*. Old Cazot set before me some simple refreshment, a *grillade de châtaignes*, some maize and milk, and a dish of trout just caught in the Gave below, while I looked at my châtelaine, marvelling how that young delicate creature could come to be shut up with an old peasant on a remote hill-side. I did my best to draw her out and learn her history; she was shy at first of a complete stranger, as was but natural, but I spoke of Gavarnie, of the beauty of the Pyrenees, or Tourmalet, and the Lac Bleu, and, warming with enthusiasm for her birthplace, the girl forgot that I was a foreign tourist, unknown to her, and indebted to her for an hour's shelter, and before my impromptu supper was over I had drawn from her, by a few questions, which she was too much of a child and had too little to conceal not to answer with a child's ingenuousness, the whole of her short history, and the explanation of her anomalous position. Her name was Florelle de l'Heris, a name once powerful enough among the nobles of the Midi, and the old woman, Madame Cazot, was her father's foster-sister. Of her family, beggared in common with the best aristocracy of France, none were now left; they had dwindled and fallen away, till of the once great house of L'Heris this child remained alone its representative; her mother had died in her infancy, and her father, either too idle or too broken-hearted to care to retrieve his fortunes, lived the life of a hermit among these ruins where I now found his daughter, educating her himself till his death, which occurred when she was only twelve years old, leaving her to poverty and obscurity, and such protection and companionship as her old nurse Cazot could afford her. Such was the story Florelle de l'Heris told me as I sat there that evening, waiting till the clouds should clear and the mists roll off enough to let me go to St. Sauveur— a story told simply and pathetically, and which Cazot, sitting knitting in a corner, added to by a hundred gesticulations, expletives, appeals to the Virgin, and prolix addenda, glad, I dare say, of any new confidant, and disposed to regard me with gratitude for my sincere praises of her fried trout. It was a story which seemed to me to suit the delicate beauty of the flower I had found in the wilderness, and read more like a chapter of some versified novellette, like 'Lucille,' than a *bonâ fide* page out of the book of one's actual life, especially in a life like mine, of essentially material pleasures and emphatically substantial and palpable ambitions. But there *are* odd stories in real life!—strange pathetic ones, too—stranger, often, than those that found the plot and underplot of a novel or the basis of a poem! but when such men as I come across them they startle us, they look bizarre and unlike all the other leaves of the book that glitter with worldly aphorisms, philosophical maxims, and pungent egotisms, and we would fain cut them out; they have the ring of that Arcadia whose golden gates shut on us when we outgrew boyhood, and in which, *en revanche*, we have sworn ever since to disbelieve—keeping our word sometimes, perhaps to our own hindrance—Heaven knows!

"I stayed as long as I could that evening, till the weather had cleared up so long, and the sun was shining again so indisputably, that I had no longer any excuse to linger in the dark tapestried room, with the chestnuts sputtering among the wood-ashes, and Madame Cazot's needles clicking one continual refrain, and the soft gazelle eyes of my young châtelaine glancing from my sketches to me with that mixture of shyness and fearlessness, innocence and candour, which gave so great a charm to her manner. She was a new study to me, both for my palette and my mind—a pretty fresh toy to amuse me while I should stay in the Midi. I was not going to leave without making sure of a permission to return. I wanted to have that face among my pastels, and when I had thanked her for her shelter and her welcome, I told her my name, and asked her leave to come again where I had been so kindly received.

"'Come again, monsieur? Certainly, if you care to come. But you will find it a long way from Luz, I fear,' she said, naively, looking up at me with her large clear fawn-like eyes—eyes so cloudless and untroubled *then*—as she let me take her hand, and bade me adieu et bonsoir.

"I reassured her on that score, you can fancy, and left her standing in the deep embrazured window, a great stag-hound at her feet, and the setting sun, all the brighter for its past eclipse, bathing her in light. I can always see her in memory as I saw her then, poor child!——Faugh! How hot the night is! Can't we get more air anyhow?

"'If you come again up here, m'sieu, you will be the first visitor the Nid de l' Aigle has seen for four years,' said old Cazot, as she showed me out through the dusky vaulted passage. She was a cheerful, garrulous old woman, strong in her devotion to the De l'Heris of the bygone past; stronger even yet in her love for their single orphan representative of the beggared present. 'Visitors! Is it likely we should have any, m'sieur? Those that would suit me would be bad company for Ma'amselle Florelle, and those that should seek her never do. I recollect the time, m'sieu, when the highest in all the departments were glad to come to the bidding of a De l'Heris; but generations have gone since then, and lands and gold gone too, and, if you cannot feast them, what care people for you? That is true in the Pyrenees, m'sieu, as well as in the rest of the world. I have not lived eighty years without finding out that. If my child out yonder were the heiress of the De l'Heris, there would be plenty to court and seek her; but she lives in these poor broken-down ruins with me, an old peasant woman, to care for her as best I can, and not a soul takes heed of her save the holy women at the convent, where, maybe, she will seek refuge at last.'

"She let me out at the gate where I had thundered for admittance two hours before, and giving her my thanks for her hospitality—money she would not take—I wished her good day, and rode down the bridle-path to St. Sauveur, and onwards to Luz, thinking at intervals of that fair young life that had but just sprung up, and was already destined to wither away its bloom in a convent. Any destiny would be better to proffer to her than that. She interested me already by her childlike loveliness and her strange solitude of position, and I thought she would while away some of the long summer hours during my stay in the Midi, when I was tired of chamois and palette, and my lazy dolce under the beech-wood shades. At any rate she was newer and more charming than the belles of Eaux Bonnes.

"The next morning I remembered her permission and my promise, and I rode out through the town again, up the mountain-road to the Nid de l'Aigle; glad of anything that gave me an amusement and a pursuit. I never wholly appreciate the far niente, I think; perhaps I have lived too entirely in the world—and a world ultra-cold and courtly, too—to retain much patience for the meditative life, the life of trees and woods, sermons in stones, and monologues in mountains. I am a restless, ambitious man; I must have a *pursuit* be it of a great aim or a small, or I grow weary, and my time hangs heavily on hand. Already having found Florelle de l'Heris among these hills reconciled me more to my *pro tempo* banishment from society, excitement, and pleasure, and I thanked my good fortune for having lighted upon her. She was very lovely, and I always care more for the physical than the intellectual charms of any woman. I do not share some men's visionary requirements on their mental score; I ask but material beauty, and am content with it.

"I rode up to the Nid de l'Aigle: by a clearer light it stood on a spot of great picturesqueness, and before the fury of the revolutionary peasantry had destroyed what was the then habitable and stately château, must have been a place of considerable extent and beauty, and in the feudal times, fenced in by the natural ramparts of its shelving rocks, no doubt all but impregnable. There were but a few ruins now that held together and had a roof over them—the part where Madame Cazot and the last of the De l'Heris lived; it was perfectly solitary; there was nothing to be heard round it but the foaming of the river, the music of the sheep-bells from the flocks that fed in the clefts and on the slopes of grass-land, and the shout of some shepherd-boy from the path below: but it was as beautiful a spot as any in the Pyrenees, with its overhanging beech-woods, its wilderness of wild flowers, its rocks covered with that soft grey moss whose tint defies one to repeat it in oil or water-colours, and its larches and beeches drooping over into the waters of the Gave. In such a home, with no companions save her father, old Cazot, and her great staghound, and, occasionally, the quiet recluses of St. Marie Purificatrice, with everything to feed her native poetry and susceptibility, and nothing to teach her anything of the actual and ordinary world, it were inevitable that the character of Florelle should take its colouring from the scenes around her, and that she should grow up singularly childlike, imaginative, and innocent of all that in any other life she would unavoidably have known. Well educated she was, through her father and the nuns, but it was a semi-religious and peculiar education, of which the chief literature had been the legendary and sacred poetry of France and Spain, the chief amusement copying the illuminated missals lent her by the nuns, or joining in the choral services of the convent; an education that taught her nothing of the world from which she was shut out, and encouraged all that was self-devoted, visionary, and fervid in her nature, leaving her at seventeen as unconscious of evil as the youngest child. I despair of making you imagine what Florelle then was. Had I never met her, I should have believed in her as little as yourself, and would have discredited the existence of so poetic a creation out of the world of fiction; her ethereal delicacy, her sunny gaiety when anything amused her, her intense sensitiveness, pained in a moment by a harsh word, pleased as soon by a kind one, her innocence of all the blots and cruelties, artifices and evils, of that world beyond her Nid de l'Aigle, made a character strangely new to me, and strangely winning, but which to you I despair of portraying: I could not have *imagined* it. Had I never seen her, and had I met with it in the pages of a novel, I should have put it aside as a graceful but impossible conception of romance.

"I went up that day to the Nid de l'Aigle, and Florelle received me with pleasure; perhaps Madame Cazot had instilled into her some scepticism that 'a grand seigneur,' as the woman was pleased to term me, would trouble himself to ride up the mountains from Luz merely to repeat his thanks for an hour's shelter and a supper of roasted chesnuts. She was a simple-minded, good-hearted old woman, who had lived all her life among the rocks and rivers of the Hautes-Pyrénées, her longest excursion a market-day to Luz or Bagnéres. She looked on her young mistress and charge as a child—in truth, Florelle was but little more—and thought my visit paid simply from gratitude and courtesy, never dreaming of attributing it to 'cette beauté héréditaire des L'Heris,' which she was proud of boasting was an inalienable heirloom to the family.

"I often repeated my visits; so often that in a week or so the old ruined château grew a natural resort in the long summer days, and Florelle watched for my coming from the deep arched window where I had seen her first, or from under the boughs of the great copper-beech that grew before the gate, and looked for me as regularly as though I were to spend my lifetime in the valley of Luz. Poor child! I never told her my title, but I taught her to call me by my Christian name. It used to sound very pretty when she said it, with her long Southern pronunciation—prettier than it ever sounds now from the lips of Beatrice Acqua d'Oro yonder, in her softest moments, when she plays at sentiment. She had a great natural talent for art, hitherto uncultivated, of course, save by such instructions as one of the women at the convent, skilful in illuminating, had occasionally given her. I amused myself with teaching her to transfer to paper and canvas the scenery she loved so passionately. I spent many hours training this talent of hers, that was of very unusual calibre, and, with due culture, might have ranked her with Elisabetta Sirani or Rosa Bonheur. Sitting with her in the old room, or under the beech-trees, or by the side of the torrents that tore down the rocks into the Gave, it pleased me to draw out her unsullied thoughts, to spread her mind out before me like a book—a pure book enough, God knows, with not even a stain of the world upon it—to make her eyes glisten and glow and dilate, to fill them with tears or laughter at my will, to wake up her young life from its unconscious, untroubled, childish repose to a new happiness, a new pain, which she felt but could not translate, which dawned in her face for me, but never spoke in its true language to her, ignorant then of its very name—it amused me. Bah! our amusements are cruel sometimes, and costly too!

"It was at that time I took the head in pastels which you have seen, and she asked me, in innocent admiration of its loveliness, if she was *indeed* like that?—This night is awfully oppressive. Is that water in that caraffe? Is it iced? Push it to me. Thank you.

"I was always welcome at the Nid de l'Aigle. Old Cazot, with the instinct of servants who have lived with people of birth till they are as proud of their master's heraldry as though it were their own, discerned that I was of the same rank as her adored House of De l'Heris—if indeed she admitted any equal to them—and with all the cheery familiarity of a Frenchwoman treated me with punctilious deference, being as thoroughly imbued with respect and adoration for the aristocracy as any of those who died for the white lilies in the Place de la Révolution. And Florelle—Florelle watched for me, and counted her hours by those I spent with her. You are sure I had not read and played with women's hearts so long—women, too, with a thousand veils and evasions and artifices, of which she was in pure ignorance even of the existence—without having this heart, young, unworn, and unoccupied, under my power at once, plastic to mould as wax, ready to receive any impressions at my hands, and moulded easily to my will. Florelle had read no love-stories to help her to translate this new life to which I awoke her, or to put her on her guard against it. I went there often, every day at last, teaching my pupil the art which she was only too glad and too eager to learn, stirring her vivid imagination with descriptions of that brilliant outside world, of whose pleasures, gaieties, and pursuits she was as ignorant as any little gentian flower on the rocks; keeping her spell-bound with glimpses of its life, which looked to her like fairyland, bizarre bal masqué though it be to us; and pleasing myself with awakening new thoughts, new impressions, new emotions, which swept over her tell-tale face like the lights and shades over meadow-land as the sun fades on and off it. She was a new study, a new amusement to me, after the women of our world, and I beguiled my time with her, not thoughtlessly, as I might have done, not too hastily, as I *should* have done ten years before, but pleased with my new amusement, and more charmed with Florelle than I at first knew, though I confess I soon wished to make her love me, and soon tried my best to make her do so—an easy task when one has had some practice in the rose-hued atmosphere of the boudoir, among the most difficile and the most brilliant coquettes of Europe! Florelle, with a nature singularly loving, and a mind singularly imaginative, with no rival for me even in her fancy, soon lavished on me all the love of which her impassioned and poetic character was capable. She did not know it, but I did. She loved me, poor child!—love more pure, unselfish, and fond than I ever won before, than I shall ever win again.

"Basta! why need you have lighted on that crayon-head, and make me rake up this story? I loathe looking at the past. What good ever comes of it? A wise man lives only in his present. 'La vita è appunto una memoria, una speranza, un punto,' writes the fool of a poet, as though the bygone memories and the unrealised hopes were worth a straw! It is that very present 'instant' that he despises which is available, and in which, when we are in our senses, we absorb ourselves, knowing that that alone will yield a fruit worth having. What are the fruits of the others? only Dead Sea apples that crumble into ash.

"I knew that Florelle loved me; that I, and I alone, filled both her imagination and her heart. I would not precipitately startle her into any avowal of it. I liked to see it dawn in her face and gleam in her eyes, guilelessly and unconsciously. It was a new pleasure to me, a new charm in that book of Woman of which I had thought I knew every phase, and had exhausted every reading. I taught Florelle to love me, but I would not give her a name to my teaching till she found it herself. I returned it? Oh yes, I loved her, selfishly, as most people, men or women, do love, let them say what they will; *very* selfishly, perhaps—a love that was beneath her—a love for which, had she seen into my heart, she might have disdained, and hated me, if her soft nature could have been moved to so fierce a thing as hate—a love that sought its own gratification, and thought nothing of her welfare—a love *not* worthy of her, as I sometimes felt then, as I believe now.

"I had been about six weeks in the Pyrenees since the day I lost myself en route from Gavarnie; most of the days I had spent three or four hours, often more, at the Nid de l'Aigle, giving my painting lessons to Florelle, or being guided by her among the beech-wooded and mountain passes near her home. The dreariest fens and flats might have gathered interest from such a guide, and the glorious beauties of the Midi, well suited to her, gained additional poetry from her impassioned love for them, and her fond knowledge of all their legends, superstitions, histories, and associated memories, gathered from the oral lore of the peasantry, the cradle songs of Madame Cazot, and the stories of the old chronicles of the South. Heavens! what a wealth of imagination, talent, genius, lay in her if *I* had not destroyed it!

"At length the time drew near when my so-called sojourn at the Baths must end. One day Florelle and I were out sketching, as usual; she sat under one of the great beeches, within a few feet of one of the cascades that fell into the Gave du Pau, and I lay on the grass by her, looking into those clear gazelle eyes that met mine so brightly and trustfully, watching the progress of her brush, and throwing twigs and stones into the spray of the torrent. I can remember the place as though it were yesterday, the splash of the foam over the rocks, the tinkle of the sheep-bells from the hills, the scent of the wild flowers growing round, the glowing golden light that spread over the woodlands, touching even the distant crest of Mont Aigu and the Pic du Midi. Strange how some scenes will stamp themselves on the camera of the brain never to be effaced, let one try all that one may.

"There, that morning, I for the first time since we had met, spoke of leaving Luz, and of going back to that life which I had so often amused her by describing. Happy in her present, ignorant of how soon the scenes so familiar and dear to her would tire and pall on me, and infinitely too much of a child to have looked beyond, or speculated upon anything which I had not spoken of to her, it had not presented itself to her that this sort of life could not go on for ever; that even she would not reconcile me long to the banishment from my own world, and that in the nature of things we must either become more to each other than we were now, or part as strangers, whom chance had thrown together for a little time. She loved me, but, as I say, so innocently and uncalculatingly, that she never knew it till I spoke of leaving her; then she grew very pale, her eyes filled with tears, and shunned mine for the first time, and, as an anatomist watches the quiver of pain in his victim, so I watched the suffering of mine. It was her first taste of the bitterness of life, and while I inflicted the pain I smiled at it, pleased in my egotism to see the power I had over her. It was cruel, I grant it, but in confessing it I only confess to what nine out of ten men have felt, though they conceal or deny it.

"'You will miss me, Florelle?' I asked her. She looked at me reproachfully, wistfully, piteously, the sort of look I have seen in the eyes of a dying deer; too bewildered by this sudden mention of my departure to answer in words. No answer was needed with eyes so eloquent as hers, but I repeat it again. I knew I gave pain, but I knew too, I should soon console her. Her lips quivered, and the tears gathered in her eyes; she had not known enough of sorrow to have learnt to dissemble it. I asked her if she loved me so much that she was unwilling to bid me farewell. For the first time her eyes sank beneath mine, and a hot painful colour flushed over her face. Poor child! if ever I have been loved by any woman, I was loved by her. Then I woke her heart from its innocent peaceful rest, with words that spoke a language utterly new to her. I sketched to her a life with me that made her cheeks glow, and her lips quiver, and her eyes grow dark. She was lovelier in those moments than any art could ever attempt to picture! She loved me, and I made her tell me so over and over again. She put her fate unhesitatingly into my hands, and rejoiced in the passion I vowed her, little understanding how selfishly I sought her, little thinking, in her ignorance of the evil of the world, that while she rejoiced in the fondness I lavished on her, and worshipped me as though I were some superior unerring godlike being, she was to me only a new toy, only a pursuit of the hour, a plaything, too, of which I foresaw I should tire! Isn't it Benjamin Constant who says, 'Malheureux l'homme qui, dans le commencement d'un amour, prévoit avec une précision cruelle l'heure où il en sera lassé'?

"As it happened, I had made that morning an appointment in Luz with some men I knew, who happened to be passing through it, and had stopped there that day to go up the Pic du Midi the next, so that I could spend only an hour or two with Florelle. I took her to her home, parted with her for a few hours, and went down the path. I remember how she stood looking after me under the heavy grey stone-work of the gateway, the tendrils of the ivy hanging down and touching her hair that glistened in the sunshine as she smiled me her adieux. My words had translated, for the first time, all the newly-dawned emotions that had lately stirred in her heart, while she knew not their name.

"I soon lost sight of her through a sharp turn of the bridle-path round the rocks, and went on my way thinking of my new love, of how completely I held the threads of her fate in my hands, and how entirely it lay in my power to touch the chords of her young heart into acute pain or into as acute pleasure with one word of mine—of how utterly I could mould her character, her life, her fate, whether for happiness or misery, at my will. I loved her well enough, if only for her unusual beauty, to feel triumph at my entire power, and to feel a tinge of her own poetry and tenderness of feeling stirring in me as I went on under the green, drooping, fanlight boughs of the pines, thinking of Florelle de l'Heris.

"'M'sieu! permettez-moi vous parle un p'tit mot?'

"Madame Cazot's patois made me look up, almost startled for the moment, though there was nothing astonishing in her appearance there, in her accustomed spot under the shade of a mountain-ash and a great boulder of rock, occupied at her usual task, washing linen in the Gave, as it foamed and rushed over its stones. She raised herself from her work and looked up at me, shading her eyes from the light—a sunburnt, wrinkled, hardy, old woman, with her scarlet capulet, her blue cloth jacket, and her brown woollen petticoat, so strange a contrast to the figure I had lately left under the gateway of the Nid de l'Aigle, that it was difficult to believe them even of the same sex or country.

"She spoke with extreme deference, as she always did, but so earnestly, that I looked at her in surprise, and stopped to hear what it might be she had to say. She was but a peasant woman, but she had a certain dignity of manner for all that, caught, no doubt, from her long service with, and her pride in, the De l'Heris.

"'M'sieu, I have no right, perhaps, to address you; you are a grand seigneur, and I but a poor peasant woman. Nevertheless, I must speak. I have a charge to which I shall have to answer in the other world to God and to my master. M'sieu, pardon me what I say, but you love Ma'amselle Florelle?'

"I stared at the woman, astonished at her interference and annoyed at her presumption, and motioned her aside with my stick. But she placed herself in the path—a narrow path—on which two people could not have stood without one or other going into the Gave, and stopped me resolutely and respectfully, shading her eyes from the sun, and looking steadily at my face.

"'M'sieu, a little while ago, in the gateway yonder, when you parted with Ma'amselle Florelle, I was coming out behind you to bring my linen to the river, and I saw you take her in your arms and kiss her many times, and whisper to her that you would come again "ce soir!" Then, m'sieu, I knew that you must love my little lady, or, at least, must have made her love you. I have thought her—living always with her—but a beautiful child still; but you have found her a beautiful woman, and loved her, or taught her love, m'sieu. Pardon me if I wrong your honour, but my master left her in my charge, and I am an ignorant old peasant, ill-fitted for such a trust; but is this love of yours such as the Sieur de l'Heris, were he now on earth, would put his hand in your own and thank you for, or is it such that he would wash out its insult in your blood or his?'

"Her words amazed me for a moment, first at the presumption of an interference of which I had never dreamt, next at the iron firmness with which this old woman, nothing daunted, spoke, as though the blood of a race of kings ran in her veins. I laughed a little at the absurdity of this cross-questioning from her to me, and not choosing to bandy words with her, bade her move aside; but her eyes blazed like fire; she stood firm as the earth itself.

"'M'sieu, answer me! You love Ma'amselle Florelle—you have asked her in marriage?'

"I smiled involuntarily:

"'My good woman, men of my class don't marry every pretty face they meet; we are not so fond of the institution. You mean well, I know; at the same time, you are deucedly impertinent, and I am not accustomed to interference. Have the goodness to let me pass, if you please.'

"But she would not move. She folded her arms across her chest, quivering from head to foot with passion, her deep-set eyes flashed like coals under her bushy eyebrows.

"'M'sieu, I understand you well enough. The house of the L'Heris is fallen, ruined, and beggared, and you deem dishonour may approach it unrebuked and unrevenged. Listen to me, m'sieu; I am but a woman, it is true, and old, but I swore by Heaven and Our Lady to the Sieur de l'Heris, when he lay dying yonder, years ago, that I would serve the child he left, as my forefathers had served his in peace and war for centuries, and keep and guard her as best I might dearer than my own heart's blood. Listen to me. Before this love of yours shall breathe another word into her ear to scorch and sully it; before your lips shall ever meet hers again; before you say again to a De l'Heris poor and powerless, what you would never have dared to say to a De l'Heris rich and powerful, I will defend her as the eagles by the Nid de l'Aigle defend their young. You shall only reach her across my dead body!'

"She spoke with the vehemence and passionate gesticulation of a Southern; in her patois, it is true, and with rude eloquence, but there was an odd *timbre* of pathos in her voice, harsh though it was, and a certain wild dignity about her through the very earnestness and passion that inspired her. I told her she was mad, and would have put her out of my path, but, planting herself before me, she laid hold of my arm so firmly that I could not have pushed forwards without violence, which I would not have used to a woman, and a woman, moreover, as old as she was.

"'Listen to one word more, m'sieu. I know not what title you may bear in your own country, but I saw a coronet upon your handkerchief the other day, and I can tell you are a grand seigneur—you have the air of it, the manner. M'sieu, you can have many women to love you; cannot you spare this one? you must have many pleasures, pursuits, enjoyments in your world, can you not leave me this single treasure? Think, m'sieu! If Ma'amselle Florelle loves you now, she will love you only the dearer as years go on; and *you*, you will tire of her, weary of her, want change, fresh beauty, new excitement—you must know that you will, or why should you shrink from the bondage of marriage?—you will weary of her; you will neglect her first and desert her afterwards; what will be the child's life *then?* Think! You have done her cruel harm enough now with your wooing words, why will you do her more? What is your love beside hers? If you have heart or conscience you cannot dare to contrast them together; *she* would give up everything for you and *you* would give up nothing? M'sieu, Florelle is not like the women of your world; she is innocent of evil as the holy saints! those who meet her should guard her from the knowledge, and not lead her to it. Were the Sieur de l'Heris living now, were her House as powerful as I have known them, would you have dared or dreamt of seeking her as you do now? M'sieu, he who wrongs trust, betrays hospitality, and takes advantage of that very purity, guilelessness, and want of due protection which should be the best and strongest appeal to every man of chivalry and honour—he, whoever he be, the De l'Heris would have held, as what he is, a coward! Will you not now have pity upon the child, and let her go?'

"I have seldom been moved in, never been swayed from, any pursuit or any purpose, whether of love, or pleasure, or ambition; but something in old Cazot's words stirred me strangely, more strangely still from the daring and singularity of the speaker. Her intense love for her young charge gave her pathos, eloquence, and even a certain rude majesty, as she spoke; her bronzed wrinkled features worked with emotions she could not repress, and hot tears fell over her hard cheeks. I felt that what she said was true; that as surely as the night follows the day would weariness of it succeed to my love for Florelle, that to the hospitality I had so readily received I had, in truth, given but an ill return, and that I had deliberately taken advantage of the very ignorance of the world and faith in me which should have most appealed to my honour. I knew what she said was true, and this epithet of 'coward' hit me harder from the lips of a woman, on whom her sex would not let me avenge it, with whom my conscience would not let me dispute it, than it would have done from any man. *I* called a coward by an old peasant woman! absurd idea enough, wasn't it? It is a more absurd one still that I could not listen to her unmoved, that her words touched me—how or why I could not have told—stirred up in me something of weakness, unselfishness, or chivalrousness—I know not what exactly—that prompted me for once to give up my own egotistical evanescent passions and act to Florelle as though all the males of her house were on earth to make me render account of my acts. At old Cazot's words I shrank for once from my own motives and my own desires, shrank from classing Florelle with the *cocottes* of my world, from bringing her down to their level and their life.

"'You will have pity on her, m'sieu, and go?' asked old Cazot, more softly, as she looked in my face.

"I did not answer her, but put her aside out of my way, went down the mountain-path to where my horse was left cropping the grass on the level ground beneath a plane-tree, and rode at a gallop into Luz without looking back at the grey-turreted ruins of the Nid de l'Aigle.

"And I left Luz that night without seeing Florelle de l'Heris again—a tardy kindness—one, perhaps, as cruel as the cruelty from which old Cazot had protected her. Don't you think I was a fool, indeed, for once in my life, to listen to an old woman's prating! Call me so if you like, I shall not dispute it; we hardly know when we are fools, and when wise men! Well! I have not been much given to such weaknesses.

"I left Luz, sending a letter to Florelle, in which I bade her farewell, and entreated her to forget me—an entreaty which, while I made it, I felt would not be obeyed—one which, in the selfishness of my heart, I dare say, I hoped might not be. I went back to my old diplomatic and social life, to my customary pursuits, amusements, and ambitions, turning over the leaf of my life that contained my sojourn in the Pyrenees, as you turn over the page of a romance to which you will never recur. I led the same life, occupied myself with my old ambitions, and enjoyed my old pleasures; but I could not forget Florelle as wholly as I wished and tried to do. I had not usually been troubled with such memories; if unwelcome, I could generally thrust them aside; but Florelle I did not forget; the more I saw of other women the sweeter and brighter seemed by contrast her sensitive, delicate nature, unsullied by the world, and unstained by artifice and falsehood. The longer time went on, the more I regretted having given her up—perhaps on no better principle than that on which a child cares most for the toy he cannot have; perhaps, because, away from her, I realised that I had lost the purest and the strongest love I had ever won. In the whirl of my customary life I sometimes wondered how she had received my letter, and how far the iron had burnt into her young heart—wondered if she had joined the Sisters of Sainte Marie Purificatrice, or still led her solitary life among the rocks and beechwoods of Nid de l'Aigle. I often thought of her, little as the life I led was conducive to regretful or romantic thoughts. At length, my desire to see her again grew ungovernable. I had never been in the habit of refusing myself what I wished; a man is a fool who does, if his wishes are in any degree attainable. And at the end of the season I went over to Paris, and down again once more into the Midi. I reached Luz, lying in the warm golden Pyrenean light as I had left it, and took once more the old familiar road up the hills to the Nid de l'Aigle. There had been no outward change from the year that had flown by; there drooped the fanlike branches of the pines; there rushed the Gave over its rocky bed; there came the silvery sheep-bell chimes down the mountain-sides; there, over hill and wood, streamed the mellow glories of the Southern sunlight. There is something unutterably painful in the sight of any place after one's lengthened absence, wearing the same smile, lying in the same sunlight. I rode on, picturing the flush of gladness that would dawn in Florelle's face at the sight of me, thinking that Mme. Cazot should not part me from her again, even, I thought, as I saw the old grey turrets above the beechwoods, if I paid old Cazot's exacted penalty of marriage! I loved Florelle more deeply than I had done twelve months before. 'L'absence allument les grandes passions et éteignent les petites,' they say. It had been the reverse with me.

"I rode up the bridle-path and passed through the old gateway. There was an unusual stillness about the place; nothing but the roar of the torrent near, and the songs of the birds in the branches speaking in the summer air. My impatience to see Florelle, or to hear her, grew ungovernable. The door stood open. I groped my way through the passage and pushed open the door of the old room. Under the oriel window, where I had seen her first, she lay on a little couch. I saw her again—but *how?* My God! to the day of my death I shall never forget her face as I saw it then; it was turned from me, and her hair streamed over her pillows, but as the sunlight fell upon it, I knew well enough what was written there. Old Cazot, sitting by the bed with her head on her arms, looked up, and came towards me, forcing me back.

"'You are come at last to see her die. Look on your work—look well at it—and then go; with my curse upon you!'

"I shook off her grasp, and forcing my way towards the window, threw myself down by Florelle's bed; till then I never knew how well I loved her. My voice awoke her from her sleep, and, with a wild cry of joy, she started up, weak as she was, and threw her arms round my neck, clinging to me with her little hands, and crying to me deliriously not to leave her while she lived—to stay with her till death should take her; where had I been so long? why had I come so late? *So late!*—those piteous words! As I held her in my arms, unconscious from the shock, and saw the pitiless marks that disease, the most hopeless and the most cruel, had made on the face that I had left fair, bright, and full of life as any child's, I felt the full bitterness of that piteous reproach, 'Why had I come so late?'

"What need to tell you more? Florelle de l'Heris was dying, and I had killed her. The child that I had loved so selfishly had loved me with all the concentrated tenderness of her isolated and impassioned nature; the letter I wrote bidding her farewell had given her her death-blow. They told me that from the day she received that letter everything lost its interest for her. She would sit for hours looking down the road to Luz, as though watching wearily for one who never came, or kneeling before the pictures I had left as before some altar, praying to heaven to take care of me, and bless me, and let her see me once again before she died. Consumption had killed her mother in her youth; during the chill winter at the Nid de l'Aigle the hereditary disease settled upon her. When I found her she was dying fast. All the medical aid, all the alleviations, luxuries, resources, that money could procure, to ward off the death I would have given twenty years of my life to avert, I lavished on her, but they were useless; for my consolation they told me that, used a few months earlier, they would have saved her! She lingered three weeks, fading away like a flower gathered before its fullest bloom. Each day was torture to me. I knew enough of the disease to know from the first there was no hope for her or me. Those long terrible night-hours, when she lay with her head upon my shoulder, and her little hot thin hands in mine, while I listened, uncertain whether every breath was not the last, or whether life was not already fled! By God! I cannot think of them!

"One of those long summer nights Florelle died: happy with me, loving and forgiving me to the last; speaking to the last of that reunion in which *she*, in her innocent faith, believed and hoped, according to the promise of her creed!—died with her hands clasped round my neck, and her eyes looking up to mine, till the last ray of light was quenched in them—died while the morning dawn rose in the east and cast a golden radiance on her face, the herald of a day to which she never woke!"

There was a dead silence between us; the Arno splashed against the wall below, murmuring its eternal song beneath its bridge, while the dark heavy clouds drifted over the sky with a sullen roll of thunder. He lay back in his chair, the deep shadow from the balcony pillar hiding his face from me, and his voice quivered painfully as he spoke the last words of his story. He was silent for many minutes, and so was I, regretting that my careless question had unfolded a page out of his life's history written in characters so painful to him. Such skeletons dwell in the hearts of most; hands need be tender that disentomb them and drag out to daylight ashes so mournful and so grievous, guarded so tenaciously, hidden so jealously. Each of us is tender over his own, but who does not think his brother's fit subject for jest, for gibe, for mocking dance of death?

He raised himself with a laugh, but his lips looked white as death as he drank down a draught of the Hermitage.

"Well! what say you: is the maxim right, *y-a-t-il femmes et femmes?* Caramba! why need you have pitched upon that portfolio?—There are the lights in the Acqua d'Oro's palace; we must go, or we shall get into disgrace."

We went, and Beatrice Acqua d'Oro talked very ardent Italian to him, and the Comtesse Bois de Sandal remarked to me what a brilliant and successful man Lord —— was, but how unimpressionable!—as cold and as glittering as ice. Nothing had ever made him *feel*, she was quite certain, pretty complimentary nonsense though he often talked. What would the Marchesa and the Comtesse have said, I wonder, had I told them of that little grave under the Pyrenean beech-woods?

So much does the world know of any of us! In the lives of all men are doubled-down pages written on in secret, folded out of sight, forgotten as they make other entries in the diary, never read by their fellows, only glanced at by themselves in some midnight hour of solitude.

Basta! they are painful reading, my friends. Don't you find them so? Let us leave the skeletons in the closet, the pictures in the portfolio, the doubled-down pages in the locked diary, and go to Beatrice Acqua d'Oro's, where the lights are burning gaily. What is Madame Bois de Sandal, *née* Dashwood, singing in the music-room?

> The tender grace of a day that is dead
> Will never come back to me!

That is the burden of many songs sung in this world, for some dead flowers strew most paths, and grass grows over myriad graves, and many leaves are folded down in many lives, I fear. And—retrospection is very idle, my good fellow, and regret is as bad as the tic, and flirting is deucedly pleasant; the white Hermitage we drank to-night is gone, we know, but are there no other bottles left of wine every whit as good? Shall we waste our time sighing after spilt lees? Surely not. And yet—ah me!—the dead fragrance of those virtues that yielded us the golden nectar of our youth!

THE BEAUTY OF VICQ D'AZYR;

OR,

"NOT AT ALL A PROPER PERSON."

Bon ami, do you consider the possession of sisters an agreeable addition to anybody's existence? *I* hold it very intensely the reverse. Who puts a man down so spitefully as his sisters? Who refuses so obstinately to see any good in the Nazarene they have known from their nurseries? Who snubs him so contumaciously, when he's a little chap in jackets and they young ladies already out? Who worries him so pertinaciously to marry their pet friend, "who has ten thousand a year, dear! Red hair? I'm sure she has not! It's the most lovely auburn! But you never see any beauty in *refined* women!" Who, if you incline towards a pretty little ineligible, rakes up so laboriously every scrap of gossip detrimental to her, and pours into your ear the delightful intelligence that she has been engaged to Powell of the Greys, is a shocking flirt, wears false teeth, is full five years older than she says she is, and has most objectionable connexions? Who, I should like to know, does any and all of these things, my good fellow, so amiably and unremittingly as your sisters? till—some day of grace, perhaps—you make a telling speech at St. Stephen's, and fling a second-hand aroma of distinction upon them; or marry a co-heiress and lady-in-her-own-right, and they *raffolent* of that charming creature, speculating on the desirability of being invited to your house when the men are down for September. Then, what a dear fellow you become! they always *were* so fond of you! a little wild! oh yes! but they are *so* glad you are changed, and think more seriously now! it was only from a *real* interest in your welfare that they used to grieve, &c., &c.

My sisters were my natural enemies, I remember, when I was in the daisy age and exposed to their thraldom; they were so blandly superior, so ineffably condescending, and wielded, with such smiling dexterity, that feminine power of torture known familiarly as "nagging!" Now, of course, they leave me in peace; but from my earliest to my emancipated years they were my natural enemies. I might occasionally excite the enmity, it is possible. I remember, when I was aged eight, covering Constance, a stately brunette, with a mortifying amount of confusion, by asking her, as she welcomed a visitor with effusion, why she said she was delighted to see her, when she had cried, "There's that odious woman again!" as we saw the carriage drive up. I have a criminal recollection of taking Gwendolina's fan, fresh from Howell and James's, and stripping it of its gold-powdered down before her face ere she could rush to its rescue, as an invaluable medium in the manufacture of May-flies. I have also a dim and guilty recollection of saying to the Hon. George Cursitt, standing then in the interesting position of my prospective brother-in-law, "Mr. Cursitt, Agneta doesn't care one straw for you. I heard her saying so last night to Con; and that if you weren't so near the title, she would never have accepted you;" which revelation inopportunely brought that desirable alliance to an end, and Olympian thunders on my culprit's head.

I had my sins, doubtless, but they were more than avenged on me; my sisters were my natural enemies, and I never knew of any man's who weren't so, more or less. Ah! my good sirs, those domesticities are all of them horrid bores, and how any man, happily and thrice blessedly free from them, can take the very worst of them voluntarily on his head by the Gate of Marriage (which differs thus remarkably from a certain Gate at Jerusalem, that at the one the camels kneel down to be lightened of all *their* burdens ere they can pass through it; at the other, the poor human animal kneels down to be loaded with all *his* ere he is permitted to enter), does pass my comprehension, I confess. I might amply avenge the injuries of my boyhood received from *mesdemoiselles mes* *sœurs.* Could I not tell Gwendolina of the pot of money dropped by her caro sposo over the Cesarewitch Stakes? Could I not intimate to Agneta where her Right Honourable lord and master spent the small hours last night, when popularly supposed to be nodding on the Treasury benches in the service of the state? Could I not rend the pride of Constance, by casually asking monsieur her husband, as I sip her coffee in her drawing-room this evening, who was that very pretty blonde with him at the Crystal Palace yesterday? the blonde being as well known about town as any other star of the demimonde. Of course I could: but I am magnanimous; I can too thoroughly sympathise with those poor fellows. My vengeance would recoil on innocent heads, so I am magnanimous and silent.

My sisters have long ceased to be mesdemoiselles, they have become mesdames, in that transforming crucible of marriage in which, assuredly, all that glitters is not gold, but in which much is swamped, and crushed, and fused with uncongenial metal, and from which the elixir of happiness but rarely exhales, whatever feminine alchemists, who patronise the hymeneal furnace, may choose to assure us to the contrary. My sisters are indisputably very fine women, and develop in full bloom all those essential qualities which their moral and mental trainers sedulously instilled into them when they were limited to the schoolroom and thorough-bass, Garcia and an "expurgated" Shakspeare, the society of Mademoiselle Colletmonté and Fräulein von Engel, and the occasional refection of a mild, religious, and respectably-twaddling fiction of the milk-and-water, pious-tendency, nursery-chronicling, and grammar-disregarding class, now-a-days indited for the mental improvement of a common-place generation in general, and growing young ladies in particular. My sisters are women of the world to perfection; indeed, for talent in refrigerating with a glance; in expressing disdain of a toilette or a ton by an upraised eye-brow; in assuming a various impenetrable plaît-il? expression at a moment's notice; in sweeping past intimate friends with a charming unconsciousness of their existence, when such unconsciousness is expedient or desirable; in reducing an unwished-for intruder into an instantaneous and agonising sense of his own de trop-ism and insignificance—in all such accomplishments and acquirements necessary to existence in all proper worlds, I think they may be matched with the best-bred lady to be found any day, from April to August, between Berkeley-square and Wilton-crescent. Constance, now Lady Maréchale, is of a saintly turn, and touched with fashionable fanaticism, pets evangelical bishops and ragged school-boys, drives to special services, and is called our noble and Christian patroness by physicians and hon. secs., holds doctrinal points and strong tracts, mixed together in equal proportion, an infallible chloride of lime for the disinfectance of our polluted globe, and appears to receive celestial telegrams of indisputable veracity and charming acrimony concerning the destiny of the vengeful contents of the Seven Vials. Agneta, now Mrs. Albany Protocol, is a Cabinet Ministress, and a second Duchesse de Longueville (in her own estimation at the least); is "strengthening her party" when she issues her dinner invitations, whispers awfully of a "crisis" when even penny-paper leaders can't get up a breeze, and spends her existence in "pushing" poor Protocol, who, thorough Englishman that he is, considers it a point of honour to stand still in all paths with praiseworthy Britannic obstinacy and opticism. Gwendolina, now Lady Frederic Farniente, is a butterfly of fashion, has delicate health, affects dilettanteism, is interested by nothing, has many other charming minauderies, and lives in an exclusive circle—so tremendously exclusive, indeed, that it is possible that she may at last draw the *cordon sanitaire* so *very* tight, that she will be left alone with the pretty woman her mirrors reflect.

They have each of them attained to what the world calls a "good position"—an eminence the world dearly reveres; if you can climb to it, *do;* never mind what dirt may cling to your feet, or what you may chance to pull down in your ascent, no questions will be asked you at the top, when you wave your flag victoriously from a plateau at a good elevation. They haven't all their ambitions—who has? If a fresh Alexander conquered the world he would fret out his life for a standing-place to be able to try Archimedes' little experiment on his newly-won globe. Lady Maréchale dies for entrance to certain salons which are closed to her; she is but a Baronet's wife, and though so heavenly-minded, has *some* weaknesses of earth. Mrs. Protocol grieves because she thinks a grateful country ought to wreathe her lord's brow with laurels—*Anglicè,* strawberry-leaves—and the country remains ungrateful, and the brows bare. Lady Frederic frets because her foe and rival, Lady Maria Fitz-Sachet, has footmen an inch taller than her own. They haven't all their ambitions satisfied. We are too occupied with kicking our dear friends and neighbours down off the rounds of the social ladder to advance ourselves always perhaps as entirely as we otherwise might do. But still they occupy "unexceptionable positions," and from those fortified and impregnable citadels are very severe upon those who are not, and very jealous of those who are, similarly favoured by fortune. When St. Peter lets ladies through the celestial portals, he'll never please them unless he locks out all their acquaintance, and indulges them with a gratifying peep at the rejected candidates.

The triad regard each other after the manner of ladies; that is to say, Lady Maréchale holds Mrs. Protocol and Lady Frederic "frivolous and worldly;" Lady Frederic gives them both one little supercilious expressive epithet; "*précieuses;*" Mrs. Protocol considers Lady Maréchale a "pharisee," and Lady Frederic a "butterfly;"—in a word, there is that charming family love to one another which ladies so delight to evince, that I suppose we must excuse them for it on the plea that

'Tis their nature to!

which Dr. Watts puts forward so amiably and grammatically in excuse for the bellicose propensities of the canine race, but which is never remembered by priest or layman in extenuation of the human.

They dislike one another—relatives always do—still, the three Arms will combine their Horse, Line, and Field Batteries in a common cause and against a common enemy; the Saint, the Politician, and the Butterfly have several rallying-points in common, and when it comes to the question of extinguishing an ineligible, of combining a sneer with a smile, of blending the unexceptionably-courteous with the indescribably-contemptuous, of calmly shutting their doors to those who won't aggrandise them, and blandly throwing them open to those who will, it would be an invidious task to give the golden apple, and decide which of the three ladies most distinguishes herself in such social prowess.

Need I say that I *don't* see very much of them?—severe strictures on society in general, with moral platitudes, over the luncheon wines at Lady Maréchale's; discourse redolent of blue-books, with vindictive hits at Protocol and myself for our disinclination to accept a "mission," and our levity of life and opinions at "a period so full of social revolutions and wide-spread agitation as the present," through the soup and fish at Agneta's; softly hissed acerbities and languidly yawned satires on the prettiest women of my acquaintance, over the coffee at Lady Frederic's; are none of them particularly inviting or alluring. And as they or similar conversational confections are invariably included in each of the three ladies' entertainments *en petite comité*, it isn't wonderful if I forswear their drawing-rooms. Chères dames, you complain, and your chosen defenders for you, that men don't affect your society now-a-days save and except when making love to you. It isn't *our* fault, indeed: you bore us, and—what can we do?—we shrink as naturally and pardonably from voluntary boredom as from any other voluntary suffering, and shirk an air redolent of ennui from the same principle as we do an air redolent of diphtheria. Self-preservation is a law of nature, and female society consists too exclusively of milk-and-water, dashed here and there with citric acid of malice, to be either a recherché or refreshing beverage to palates that have tasted warmer spices or more wholesome tonics.

So I don't see much of my triad of sisters unless accidentally, but last August I encountered them by chance at Vicq d'Azyr. Do you know Vicq d'Azyr? No? All right! when it is known universally it will be spoilt: it will soon be fashionable, dyspeptic, artificial, like the crowds that will flock to it; its warm, bubbling springs will be gathered into long upright glasses, and quaffed by yellow-visaged groups; brass bands will bray where now the thrushes, orioles, and nightingales have the woodlands to themselves; cavalcades of hired hacks will cut up its thyme-covered turf, and young ladies will sketch in tortured outline and miserable washes the glorious sweep of its mountains, the crimson tints of its forests, the rush of its tumbling torrents, the golden gleam of its southern sun. Vicq d'Azyr will be a Spa, and will be spoilt; dyspepsia and bronchia, vanities and flirtations, cares and conquests, physicians and intrigantes, real marchionesses puffing under asthma, fictitious marquises strewing chaff for pigeons, monde and demi-monde, grandes dames and dames d'industrie will float into it, a mighty army of butterflies with a locust power of destruction: Vicq d'Azyr will be no more, and in its stead we shall have—a Fashionable Bath. Vicq d'Azyr, however, is free *yet* from the hand of the spoiler, and is charming—its vine-clad hills stretching up in sunny slopes; its little homesteads nestling on the mountains' sides among the pines that load the air with their rich heavy perfume; its torrents foaming down the ravines, flinging their snowy spray far over the boughs of arbutus and mountain-ash that bend across the brinks of their rushing courses; its dark-eyed peasant girls that dance at sunset under the linden-trees like living incarnations of Florian's pastorals; its sultry brilliant summer nights, when all is still, when the birds are sleeping among the ilex-leaves, and the wind barely stirs the tangled boughs of the woodland; when night is down on the mountains, wrapping hill and valley, crag and forest in one soft purple mist, and the silence around is only broken by the mystic music of the rushing waters, the soft whir of the night-birds' wings, or the distant chime of a village clock faintly tolling through the air:——Caramba, messieurs! I beg your pardon! I don't know why I poetise on Vicq d'Azyr. *I* went there to slay, not to sketch, with a rifle, not with a stylus, to kill izzards and chamois, not to indite a poem à la mode, with double-barrelled adjectives, no metre, and a "purpose;" nor to add my quota to the luckless loaded walls of the Academy by a pre-Raphaelite landscape of arsenical green, with the effete trammels of perspective gallantly disregarded, and trees like Dr. Syntax's wife, "roundabout and rather squat," with just two-dozen-and-seven leaves apiece for liberal allowance. I went to Vicq d'Azyr, amongst other places, last August, for chamois-hunting with Dunbar, of the Queen's Bays, taking up our abode at the Toison d'Or, whither all artists, tourists, men who come for the sport, women who come for its scenery, or invalids who come for its waters (whose properties, *miserabile dictu!* are just being discovered as a panacea for every human ill—from a migraine to an "incurable pulmonary affliction"), seek accommodation if they can have it, since it is the only hotel in the place, though a very good one; is adorned with a balcony running round the house, twined and buried in honeysuckle and wild clematis, which enchants young ladies into instant promotion of it into their sketch-books; and gives you, what is of rather more importance, and what makes you ready to admire the clematis when, under gastronomic exasperation, you might swear at it as a harbour for tarantule—an omelette, I assure you, well-nigh as well cooked as you have it at Mivart's or Meurice's.

At the Toison d'Or we took up our abode, and at the Toison d'Or we encountered my two elder sisters, Constance and Agneta, travelling for once on the same road, as they had left Paris together, and were together going on to the fashionable capital of a fashionable little toy duchy on the other side of the Rhine, when they should have finished with the wilder beauties and more unknown charms of Vicq d'Azyr and its environs. Each lady had her little train of husband, courier, valet, lady's-maid, small dog, and giant jewel-box. I have put the list in the inverse ratio of their importance, I believe. Your husband *versus* your jewel-box? Of course, my dear madam; absurd! What's the value of a little simple gold ring against a dozen glittering circlets of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and garnets?

Each lady was bent on recruiting herself at Vicq d'Azyr after the toils of the season, and of shining *après* with all the brilliance that a fair share of beauty, good positions, and money, fairly entitled them to expect, at the little Court of—we will call it Lemongenseidlitz—dominated by its charming Duchess, Princess Hélène of Lemongenseidlitz-Phizzstrelitz, the loveliest and most volage of all minor royalties. Each lady was strongly opposed to whatever the other wished; each thought the weather "sultry" when the other thought it "chilly," and *vice versâ*. Each considered her own ailments "unheard-of suffering, dear!—I could never make any one feel!" &c., &c.—and assured you, with mild disdain, that the other's malady was "purely nervous, entirely exaggerated, but she *will* dwell on it so much, poor darling!" Each related to you how admirably they would have travelled if *her* counsel had been followed, and described how the other *would* take the direction of everything, *would* confuse poor Chanderlos, the courier, till he hardly knew where he was, and *would* take the night express out of pure unkindness just because she knew how ill it always made her (the speaker) feel to be torn across any country the whole night at that dreadful pace; each was dissatisfied with everything, pleased with nothing, and bored, as became ladies of good degree; each found the sun too hot or the wind too cold, the mists too damp or the air too dry, and both combined their forces to worry their ladies'-maids, find fault with the viands, drive their lords to the registering of an oath never to travel with women again, welcome us benignly, since they thought we might amuse them, and smile their sunniest on Dunbar—he's heir prospective to the Gwinne Marquisate, and Lady Marqueterie, the Saint, is not above keeping one eye open for worldly distinctions, while Mrs. Albany Protocol, though a Radical, is, like certain others of the ultra-Liberal party, not above a personal kow-towing before those "ridiculous and ought-to-be-exploded conservative institutions"—Rank and Title.

At the Toison d'Or, I say, when, after knocking over izzards *ad libitum* in another part of the district, we descended one evening into the valley where Vicq d'Azyr lies nestled in the sunset light, with the pretty vendangeuses trooping down from the sloping vineyards, and the cattle winding homewards down the hill-side paths, and the vesper-bells softly chiming from the convent tower rising yonder above its woods of linden and acacia—at the Toison d'Or, just alighting with the respective suites aforesaid, and all those portable embarrassments of books, tiger-skin rugs, flacons of bouquet, travelling-bags warranted to carry any and everything that the most fastidious can require en route from Piccadilly to Peru, with which ladies do love to encumber and embitter their own persons and their companions' lives, we met, as I have told you, mesdames, mes sœurs.

"What! Dear me, how very singular! Never should have dreamt of meeting *you;* so much too quiet a place, I should have thought. No Kursaal *here?* Come for sport—oh! Take Spes, will you? Poor little dear, he's been barking the whole way because he couldn't see out of the window. Ah, Major Dunbar, charmed to see you! What an amusing rencontre, is it not?" and Lady Maréchale, slightly out of temper for so eminent a Christian at the commencement of her greeting, smoothed down her ruffled feathers and turned smilingly on Dunbar. I have said he will be one day Marquis of Gwinne.

"By George, old fellow! *you* in this out-of-the-way place! That's all right. Sport good here? Glad to hear it? The deuce take me, if ever I am lured into travelling in a *partie carrée* again."

And Maréchale raised his eyebrows, and whispered confidentially to me stronger language than I may commit to print, though, considering his provocation, it was surely as pardonable as Uncle Toby's.

"The thing I dislike in this sort of hotels and places is the admixture of people with whom one is obliged to come in contact," said Constance, putting up her glass as she entered the long low room where the humble table d'hôte of the Toison d'Or was spread. Lady Maréchale talks sweetly of the equality of persons in the sight of Heaven, but I never heard her recognise the same upon the soil of earth.

"Exactly! One may encounter such very objectionable characters! *I* wished to dine in our own apartments, but Albany said no; and he is so positive you know! This place seems miserably primitive," responded Agneta. Mrs. Protocol pets Rouges and Republicans of every country, talks liberalism like a feminine Sièyes or John Bright, projects a Reform Bill that shall bear the strongest possible family resemblance to the Décrets du 4 Août and considers "social distinctions *odious* between man and man;" but her practice is scarcely consistent with her theory, seeing that she is about as tenacious and resentful of objectionable contact as a sea-anemone.

"Who is that, I wonder?" whispered Lady Maréchale, acidulating herself in readiness, after the custom of English ladies when catching sight of a stranger whom they "don't know."

"I wonder! All alone—how very queer!" echoed Mrs. Protocol, drawing her black lace shawl around her with that peculiar movement which announces a woman's prescience of something antagonistic to her, that is to be repelled *d'avance*, as surely as a hedgehog's transfer of itself into a prickly ball denotes a sense of a coming enemy, and a need of caution and self-protection.

"Who is that deucedly handsome woman?" whispered Maréchale to me.

"What a charming creature!" echoed Dunbar.

The person referred to was the only woman at the table d'hôte besides my sisters—a sister tourist, probably; a handsome—nay more, a beautiful woman, about eight-and-twenty, distinguished-looking, brilliant, with a figure voluptuously perfect as was ever the Princess Borghese's. To say a woman looks a lady, means nothing in our day. "That young lady will wait on you, sir," says the shopman, referring to the shopwoman who will show you your gloves. "Hand the 'errings to that lady, Joe," you hear a fishmonger cry, as you pass his shop door, referring by his epithet to some Mrs. Gamp or Betsy Prigg in search of that piscatory cheer at his stall. Heaven forbid we should give the abused and degenerate title to any woman deserving of the name! Generalise a thing, and it is vulgar. "A gentleman of my acquaintance," says Spriggs, an auctioneer and house-agent, to Smith, a collector of the water-rate. "A man I know," says Pursang, one of the Cabinet, to Greville Tempest, who is heir to a Dukedom, and has intermarried with a royal house. The reason is plain enough. Spriggs thinks it necessary to inform Smith, who otherwise might remain ignorant of so signal a fact, that he actually does know a gentleman, or rather what he terms such. Pursang knows that Tempest would never suspect him of being *lié* with men who were anything else; the one is proud of the fine English, the other is content with the simple phrase! Heaven forbid, I say, we should, now-a-days, call any woman a lady who is veritably such; let us fall back on the dignified, definite, courtly last-century name of gentlewoman. I should be glad to see that name revived; it draws a line that snobbissimi cannot pass, and has a grand simplicity about it that will not attract Spriggs, Smith, and Spark, and Mesdames S., leurs femmes.

Our sister-tourist, then, at the Toison d'Or, looked, to my eyes at the least, much more than a "lady," she looked an *aristocrate jusqu'au bout des ongles*, a beautiful, brilliant, dazzling brunette, with lovely hazel eyes, flashing like a tartaret falcon's under their arched pencilled eyebrows, quite an unhoped godsend in Vicq d'Azyr, where only stragglers resort as yet, though —alas for my Arcadia—my sister's pet physician, who sent them thither, is about, I believe, to publish a work, entitled "The Water-Spring in the Wilderness; or, A Scamper through Spots Unknown," which will do a little advertising of himself opportunely, and send hundreds next season to invade the wild woodlands and sunny valleys he inhumanly drags forth into the gas-glare of the world.

The brilliant hazel eyes were opposite to me at dinner, and were, I confess, more attractive to me than the stewed pigeons, the crisp frog-legs, and the other viands prepared by the (considering we were in the heart of one of the most remote provinces) really not bad cook of the Toison d'Or. Lady Maréchale and Mrs. Protocol honoured her with that stare by which one woman knows so well how to destroy the reputation of another without speech; they had taken her measurement by some method of feminine geometry unknown to us, and the result was apparently not favourable to her, for over the countenances of the two ladies gathered that expression of stiff dignity and virtuous disdain, in the assuming of which, as I have observed before, they are inimitable proficients. "Evidently not a proper person!" was written on every one of their lineaments. Constance and Agneta had made up their minds with celerity and decision as to her social status, with, it is to be presumed, that unerring instinct which leads their sex to a conclusion so instantaneously, that, according to a philosopher, a woman will be at the top of the staircase of Reasoning by a single spring, while a man is toiling slowly up the first few steps.

"You are intending to remain here some days, madame?" asked the fair stranger, with a charming smile, of Lady Maréchale—a pleasant little overture to chance ephemeral acquaintance, such as a table d'hôte surely well warrants.

But the pleasant little overture was one to which Lady Maréchale was far too English to respond. With that inimitable breeding for which our countrymen and women are continentally renowned, she bent her head with stately stiffness, indulged herself with a haughty stare at the offender, and turned to Agneta, to murmur in English her disgust with the *cuisine* of the really unoffending Toison d'Or.

"Poor Spes would eat nothing. Fenton must make him some panada. But perhaps there was nothing better than goat's milk in the house! What could Dr. Berkeley be thinking of?

He described the place quite as though it were a second Meurice's or Badischer Hof!"

A look of amusement glanced into the sparkling, yet languid eyes of my opposite neighbour.

"English!" she murmured to herself, with an almost imperceptible but sufficiently scornful elevation of her arched eyebrows, and a slight smile, just showing her white teeth, as I addressed her in French; and she answered me with the ease, the aplomb, the ever suave courtesy of a woman of the world, with that polish which gives the most common subjects a brilliance never their own, and that vivacity which confers on the merest trifles a spell to amuse and to charm. She was certainly a very lovely creature, and a very charming one, too; frank, animated, witty, with the tone of a woman who has seen the world and knows it. Dunbar adored her, at first sight; he is an inflammable fellow, and has been ignited a thousand times at far less provocation. Maréchale prepared for himself fifty conjugal orations by the recklessness with which, under the very eyes of madame, he devoted himself to another woman. Even Albany Protocol, dull, somnolent, and superior to such weaknesses, as becomes a president of many boards and a chairman of many committees, opened his eyes and glanced at her; and some young Cantabs and artists at the other end of the table stopped their own conversation, envying Dunbar and myself, I believe, for our juxtaposition with the *belle inconnue;* while my sisters sat trifling with the wing of a pigeon, in voluntary starvation (they would have had nothing to complain of, you will see, if they had suffered themselves to dine well!), with strong disapprobation marked upon their lineaments, of this lovely vivacious unknown, whoever she might be, talking exclusively to each other, with a certain expression of sarcastic disdain and offended virtue, hinting far more forcibly than words that they thought already the "very worst" of her.

So severe, indeed, did they look, that Dunbar, who is a good-natured fellow, and thinks—and thinks justly—that Constance and Agneta are very fine women, left me to discuss Hoffmann, Heine, and the rest of Germany's satirical poets, with my opposite neighbour, and endeavoured to thaw my sisters; a very difficult matter when once those ladies are iced. He tried Paris, but only elicited a monosyllabic remark concerning its weather; he tried Vicq d'Azyr, and was rewarded for his trouble by a withering sarcasm on the unlucky Toison d'Or; he tried chit-chat on mutual acquaintances, and the unhappy people he chanced to name were severally dismissed with a cutting satire appended to each. Lady Maréchale and Mrs. Protocol were in one of those freezing and unassailable moods in which they sealed a truce with one another, and, combining their forces against a common foe, dealt out sharp, spherical, hard-hitting little bullets of speech from behind the abatis in which they entrenched themselves.

At last he, in despair, tried Lemongenseidlitz and the ladies thawed slightly—their anticipations from that fashionable little quarter were couleur de rose. They would meet there people of the best *monde*, all their dearest—that is of course their most fashionable—friends; the dear Duchess of Frangipane, the Millamonts those charming people, M. le Marquis de Croix-et-Cordon, Sir Henry Pullinger, Mrs. Merivale-Delafield, were all there; that delightful person, too, the Graf von Rosenläu, who amused them so much at Baden last year, was, as of course Dunbar knew, Master of the Horse to the Prince of Lemongenseidlitz-Phizzstrelitz; they would be well received at the Court. Which last thing, however, they did not *say*, though they might imply, and assuredly fully thought it; since Lady Maréchale already pictured herself gently awakening his Serene Highness to the spiritual darkness of his soul in legitimatising gaming-tables in his duchy, and Mrs. Protocol already beheld herself closeted with his First Minister, giving that venerable Metternich lessons in political economy, and developing to him a system for filling his beggared treasury to overflowing, without taxing the people a kreutzer—a problem which, though it might have perplexed Kaunitz, Colbert, Pitt, Malesherbes, Talleyrand, and Palmerston put together, offered not the slightest difficulty to *her* enterprising intellect. Have I not said that Sherlock states women are at the top of the staircase while we are toiling up the first few steps?

"The Duchess—Princess Hélène—is a lovely woman, I think. Winton saw her at the Tuileries last winter, and raved about her beauty," said Dunbar, finding he had hit at last on an acceptable subject, and pursuing it with more zeal than discretion; for if there be one thing, I take it, more indiscreet than another, it is to praise woman to woman.

Constance coughed and Agneta smiled, and both assented. "Oh yes—very lovely, they believed!"

"And very lively—up to everything I think I have heard," went on Dunbar, blandly, unconscious of the meaning of cough, smile, and assent.

"Very lively!" sighed the Saint.

"*Very* lively!" smiled the Politician.

"As gay a woman as Marie Antoinette," continued Dunbar, too intent on the truffles to pay en même temps much heed to the subject he was discussing. "She's copied the Trianon, hasn't she?—has fêtes and pastorals there, acts in comedies herself, shakes off etiquette and ceremonial as much as she can, and all that sort of thing, I believe?"

Lady Maréchale leaned back in her chair, the severe virtue and dignified censure of a British matron and a modern Lucretia expressed in both attitude and countenance.

"A second Marie Antoinette?—too truly and unfortunately so, I have heard! Levity in *any* station is sufficiently reprehensible, but when exhibited in the persons of those whom a higher power has placed in exalted positions, it is most deeply to be deplored. The evil and contagion of its example become incalculable; and even when, which I believe her excusers are wont to assert of Princess Hélène, it is merely traceable to an over-gaiety of spirit and an over-carelessness of comment and censure, it should be remembered that we are enjoined to abstain from every *appearance* of evil!"

With which Constance shook out her phylacteries, represented by the thirty-guinea brocade-silk folds of her skirt (a dress I heard her describe as "very plain!—serviceable for travelling"), and glanced at my opposite neighbour with a look which said, "You are evidently not a proper person, but you hear for once what a proper person thinks!"

Our charming companion did hear it, for she apparently understood English very well. She laughed a little—a sweet, low, ringing laugh—(I was rather in love with her, I must say—I am still)—and spoke with a slight pretty accent.

"True, madame! but ah! what a pity your St. Paul did not advise, too, that people should not go by appearances, and think evil where evil is not!"

Lady Maréchale gave stare number two, with a curl of her lip, and bent her head stiffly.

"What a very strange person!" she observed to Agneta, in a murmur, meant, like a stage aside, to be duly heard and appreciated by the audience. And yet my sisters are thought very admirably-bred women, too! But then, a woman alone —a foreigner, a stranger—surely no one would exact courtesy to such from "ladies of position?"

"Have you ever seen Princess Hélène, the Duchess of Lemongenseidlitz, may I ask?" Maréchale inquired, hastily, to cover his wife's sneer. He's a very good fellow, and finds the constant and inevitable society of a saint slightly trying, and a very heavy chastisement for a few words sillily said one morning in St. George's.

"I have seen her, monsieur—yes!"

"And is she a second Marie Antoinette?"

She laughed gaily, showing her beautiful white teeth.

"Ah, bah, monsieur! many would say that is a great deal too good a comparison for her! A second Louise de Savoie—a second Duchesse de Chevreuse—nay, a second Lucrezia Borgia, some would tell you. She likes pleasure—who does not, though, except those with whom 'les raisins sont trop verts et bons pour des goujats?'"

"What an insufferably bold person!" murmured Constance.

"Very disagreeable to meet this style of people!" returned Agneta.

And both stiffened themselves with a little more starch, and we know that British wheats produce the stiffest starch in the world!

"Who, indeed!" cried Maréchale, regardless of madame's frown. "You know this for truth, then, of Princess Hélène?"

"Ah, bah, monsieur! who knows anything for truth?" laughed the lovely brunette. "The world dislikes truth so much, it is obliged to hide itself in out-of-the-way corners, and very rarely comes to light. Nobody knows the truth about her. Some think her, as you say, a second Marie Antoinette, who is surrendered to dissipation and levity, cares for nothing, and would dance and laugh over the dead bodies of the people. Others judge her as others judged Marie Antoinette; discredit the gossip, and think she is but a lively woman, who laughs at forms, likes to amuse herself, and does not see why a court should be a prison! The world likes the darker picture best; let it have it! I do not suppose it will break her heart!"

And the fair stranger laughed so sweetly that every man at the dinner-table fell in love with her on the spot; and Lady

Maréchale and Mrs. Protocol sat throughout the remainder of the meal in frozen dignity and unbreakable silence, while the lovely brunette talked with and smiled on us all with enchanting gaiety, wit, and abandon, chatting on all sorts of topics of the day.

Dinner over, she was the first to rise from the table, and bowed to us with exquisite grace and that charming smile of hers, of which the sweetest rays fell upon *me*, I swear, whether you consider the oath an emanation of personal vanity or not, my good sir. My sisters returned her bow and her good evening to them with that pointed stare which says so plainly, "You are not my equal, how dare you insult me by a courtesy?"

And scarcely had we begun to sip our coffee up-stairs in the apartments Chanderlos had secured for the miladies Anglaises, than the duo upon her began as the two ladies sat with Spes between them on a sofa beside one of the windows opening on the balcony that ran round the house. A chance inadvertent assent of Dunbar's, à propos of—oh, sin unpardonable!—the beauty of the incognita's eyes, touched the valve and unloosened the hot springs that were seething below in silence. "A handsome woman!—oh yes, a gentleman's beauty, I dare say!—but a very odd person!" commenced Mrs. Protocol. "A very strange person!" assented Lady Maréchale. "Very free manners!" added Agneta. "Quite French!" chorused Constance. "She has diamond rings—paste, no doubt!" said the Politician. "And rouges—the colour's much too lovely to be natural!" sneered the Saint. "Paints her eyebrows, too!" "Not a doubt—and tints her lashes!" "An adventuress, I should say!" "Or worse!" "Evidently not a proper person!" "Certainly not!"

Through the soft mellow air, hushed into evening silence, the words reached me, as I walked through the window on to the balcony, and stood sipping my coffee and looking lazily over the landscape, wrapped in sunset haze, over the valley where the twilight shadows were deepening, and the mountains that were steeped yet in rose-hued golden radiance from the rays that had sunk behind them.

"My dear ladies," I cried, involuntarily, "can't you find anything a little more kindly to say of a stranger who has never done you any harm, and who, fifty to one, will never cross your path again!"

"Bravo!" echoed Maréchale, who has never gone as quietly in the matrimonial break as Protocol, and indeed will never be thoroughly broken in—"bravo! women are always studying to make themselves attractive; it's a pity they don't put down among the items a trifle of generosity and charity, it would embellish them wonderfully."

Lady Maréchale beat an injured tattoo with the spoon on her saucer, and leaned back with the air of a martyr, and drawing in her lips with a smile, whose inimitable sneer any lady might have envied—it was quite priceless!

"It is the first time, Sir George, I should presume, that a husband and a brother were ever heard to unite in upbraiding a wife and a sister with her disinclination to associate with, or her averseness to countenance, an improper person!"

"An improper person!" I cried. "But, my dear Constance, who ever told you that this lady you are so desperately bitter upon has any fault at all, save the worst fault in her own sex's eyes—that of beauty? I see nothing in her; her manners are perfect; her tone——"

"You must pardon me if I decline taking your verdict on so delicate a question," interrupted Lady Maréchale, with withering satire. "Very possibly you see nothing objectionable in her—nothing at least that *you* would call so! Your views and mine are sufficiently different on every subject, and the women with whom I believe you have chiefly associated are not those calculated to give you very much appreciation for the more refined classes of our sex! Very possibly the person in question is what *you* and Sir George too, perhaps, find charming; but you must excuse me if I really cannot, to oblige you, stoop to countenance any one whom my intuition and my knowledge of the world both declare so very evidently what she should not be. She will endeavour, most probably, if she remain here, to push herself into our acquaintance, but if you and my husband should choose to insult us by favouring her efforts, Agneta and I, happily, can guard ourselves from the objectionable companionship into which those who *should* be our protectors would wish to force us!"

With which Lady Maréchale, with a little more martyrdom and an air of extreme dignity, had recourse to her *flacon* of Viola Montana, and sank among the soft cushions, a model of outraged and Spartan virtue. I set down my coffee-cup, and lounged out again to the peace of the balcony; Maréchale shrugged his shoulders, rose, and followed me. Lo! on the part of the balcony that ran under *her* windows, leaning on its balustrade, her white hand, white as the flowers, playing with the clematis tendrils, the "paste" diamond flashing in the last rays of the setting sun, stood our "dame d'industrie—or worse!" She was but a few feet farther on; she must have heard Lady Maréchale's and Mrs. Protocol's duo on her demerits; she *had* heard it, without doubt, for she was laughing gaily and joyously, laughter that sparkled all over her *riane* face, and flashed in her bright falcon eyes. Laughing still, she signed me to her. I need not say that the sign was obeyed.

"Chivalrous knight, I thank you! You are a Bayard of chivalry; you defend the absent! What a miracle, mon Dieu! Tell your friends from me not to speak so loudly when their windows are open; and for yourself, rest assured your words of this evening will not be forgotten."

"I am happy, indeed, if I have been fortunate enough to obtain a chance remembrance, but do not give me too much praise for so simple a service; the clumsiest Cimon would be stirred into chivalry under such inspiration as I had——"

The beautiful hazel eyes flashed smilingly on me under their lashes. (*Those* lashes tinted? Heaven forgive the malice of women!) She broke off a sprig of the clematis, with its long slender leaves and fragrant starry flowers, and gave it to me:

"*Tenez mon ami*, if ever you see me again, show me that faded flower, and I shall remember this evening at Vicq d'Azyr. Nay, do not flatter yourself—do not thrust it in your breast; it is no gage d'amour! it is only a reward for loyal service, and a souvenir to refresh my own memory, which is treacherous sometimes, though not in gratitude to those who serve me. Adieu, mon Bayard—et bon soir!"

But I retained the hand that had given me my clematis-spray.

"Meet you again! But will that not be to-morrow? If I am not to see you, as your words threaten, till the clematis be faded and myself forgotten, let me at least, I beseech you, know where, who, by what name——"

She drew her hand away with something of a proud surprised gesture; then she laughed again, that sweet, ringing, mocking laugh:

"No, no, Bayard, it is too much to ask! Leave the future to hazard; it is always the best philosophy. Au revoir! Adieu—perhaps for a day, perhaps for a century!"

And the bewitching mystery floated away from me and through the open window of her room. You will imagine that my "intuition" did not lead me to the conclusion to which Lady Maréchale's led her, or assuredly should I have followed the donor of the clematis, despite her prohibition. Even with my "intuition" pointing where it did, I am not sure what I might have done if, in her salon I had not caught sight of a valet and a lady's-maid in waiting with her coffee, and they are not such spectators as one generally selects.

The servants closed her windows and drew down their Venetian blinds, and I returned to my coffee. Whether the two ladies within had overheard her conversation as she had heard theirs, I cannot say, but they looked trebly refrigerated, and congealed themselves into the chilliest human ice that is imaginable, and comported themselves towards me fully and distantly as though I had brought a dozen ballet-girls in to dinner with them, or introduced them to my choicest acquaintance from the Château des Fleurs.

"A man's taste is so pitiably low!" remarked Lady Maréchale, in her favourite stage aside to Mrs. Protocol; to which that other lady responded, "Disgracefully so!"

Who *was* my lovely unknown with the bright falcon eyes and the charming laugh, with her strange freedom that yet was *not*, somehow, free, and her strange fascination? I bade my man ask Chanderlos her name—couriers know everything generally—but neither Mills nor Chanderlos give me any information. The people of the house did not know, or said they did not; they only knew she had servants in attendance who came with her, who revealed nothing, and paid any price for the best of everything. Are impertinent questions ever asked where money is plentiful?

I was dressing the next morning something later than usual, when I heard the roll of a carriage in the court-yard below. I looked through the half-open persiennes with a semi-presentiment that it was my sweet foreigner who was leaving ere I could presume on my clematis or improve our acquaintance. True enough, she it was, leaving Vicq d'Azyr in a travelling carriage, with handsome roans and servants in imperial-blue liveries. Who the deuce could she be?

"Well, Constance," said I, as I bade Lady Maréchale good morning, "your *bête noire* won't 'press herself into your acquaintance,' as you were dreading last night, and won't excite Maréchale and me to any more high treason. Won't you chant a Te Deum? She left this morning."

"So I perceived," answered Lady Maréchale, frigidly; by which I suppose *she* had not been above the weakness of looking through *her* persiennes.

"What a pity you and Agneta agitated yourselves with such unnecessary alarm! It must have cost you a great deal of eau-de-cologne and sal-volatile, I am afraid last night. Do you think she contaminated the air of the salle-à-manger, because I will order Mills to throw some disinfectant about before you go down."

"I have no inclination to jest upon a person of that stamp," rejoined Lady Maréchale, with immense dignity, settling her turquois wristband-studs.

"'That stamp of persons?' What! Do you think she is an adventuress, an intrigante, or 'worse' still, then? I hoped her dashing equipage might have done something towards cleansing her character. Wealth *is* a universal purifier generally."

"Flippant impertinence!" murmured Lady Maréchale, disgustedly, to Mrs. Protocol, as she swept onwards down the staircase, not deigning me a glance, much less a response, stiffening herself with a little extra starch of Lucretian virtue and British-matronly dignity, which did not grow limp again throughout breakfast, while she found fault with the chocolate, considered the *petits pains* execrable, condemned the sardines as uneatable, petted Spes, kept Maréchale and me at Coventry, and sighed over their enforced incarceration, by Dr. Berkeley's orders in Vicq d'Azyr, that kept them in this stupid place away from Lemongenseidlitz.

Their anticipations from Lemongenseidlitz were charmingly golden and rose-tinted. They looked forward to consolidating their friendship with the dear Duchess in its balmy air, to improving a passing acquaintance into an intimate one with that charming person the Baroness Liebenfrauenmilch, Mistress of the Robes to Princess Hélène, and to being very intimate at the Court, while the Pullingers (their bosom friends and very dear rivals) would be simply presented, and remain in chagrin, uninvited to the state balls and palace festivities. And what more delightful than that last clause? for what sauce invented, from Carême to Soyer, flavours our own *plats* so deliciously, I should like to know, as thinking that our beloved next-door neighbour is doomed to a very dry cutlet.

As Pérette, in a humbler fashion, built visions from the pot of milk, so mesdames mes sœurs, from the glittering court and capital of Lemongenseidlitz, erected brilliant châteaux en Espagne of all their sayings and doings in that fashionable little city whither they were bound, and into which they had so many invaluable passports. They were impatient to be journeying from our humble, solitary valley, and after a month of Vicq d'Azyr, they departed for their golden land, and I went with them, as I had slain izzards almost *ad nauseam*, and Dunbar's expiration of leave had taken him back to Dublin.

It was five o'clock when we reached its Reidenscher Hof, nine when we had finished dinner. It was stupid work yawning over coffee and *Galignani*. What was to be done? Maréchale proposed the Opera, and for the first time in his life was unopposed by his wife. Constance was in a suave, benignant mood; she was thinking of her Graf von Rosenläu, of the Pullingers, and of the sweet, adroit manner in which she would—when she had captivated him and could proffer such hints—awaken his Serene Highness to a sense of his moral guilt in not bringing to instant capital punishment every agent in those Satanus-farmed banks that throve throughout his duchy. Lady Maréchale and Mrs. Protocol assented, and to the little miniature gaily-decorated Opera House we drove. They were in the middle of the second act of "Ernani." "Ernani" was stale to us all, and we naturally lorgné'd the boxes in lieu of the stage. I had turned my glass on the left-hand stage-box, and was going steadily round, when a faint cry of dismay, alarm, amazement, horror, broke, muffled and low, from mesdames mes sœurs. Their lorgnons were riveted on one spot; their cheeks were blanched; their hands were tremulous; if they had beheld a spiritual visitant, no consternation more profound, more intense, could have seized both with its iron hand. *My* sisters too! the chilliest, the calmest, the most impenetrable, the most unassailable of mortals!

"And we called her, in her hearing, not a proper person!" gasped Lady Maréchale.

"We thought her a lorette! an intrigante! a dame d'industrie!" echoed Mrs. Protocol.

"Who wore paste jewels!"

"Who came from the Rue Bréda!"

"Who wanted to know us!"

"Whom we wouldn't know!"

I turned my Voightlander where their Voightlanders turned; there, in the royal box, leaning back in the fauteuil that marked her rank, there, with her lovely hazel eyes, her witching smile, her radiant beauty, matchless as the pearls gleaming above her brow, there sat "the adventuress—or worse!" of Vicq d'Azyr; the "evidently a not proper person" of my discerning sisters—H.S.H. Princess Hélène, Grand-Duchess of Lemongenseidlitz-Phizzstrelitz? Great Heavens! how had we never guessed her before? How had we never divined her identity? How had we never remembered all we had heard of her love of laisser-aller, her taste for adventure, her delight in travelling, when she could, unattended and incognita? How had we never put this and that together, and penetrated the metamorphosis?

"*And I called her not a proper person!*" gasped Lady Maréchale, again shrinking back behind the azure curtains; the projectiles she had shot with such vindictive severity, such delighted acrimony, from the murderous mortar of malice, recoiling back upon her head for once, and crushing her to powder. What reception would they have *now* at the Court? Von Rosenläu would be powerless; the Pullingers themselves would be better off! Pérette's pot of milk was smashed and spilt! "Adieu, veau, vache, cochon, couvée!"

When the pitcher lies shivered into fragments, and the milk is spilt, you know, poor Pérette's dreams are shivered and spilt with them. "I have not seen you at the palace yet?" asked her Grace of Frangipane. "We do not see you at the Court, mesdames?" asked M. de la Croix-et-Cordons. "How did it happen you were not at the Duchess's ball last night?" asked "those odious Pullingers." And what had my sister to say in reply? My clematis secured *me* a charming reception—how charming I don't feel called upon to reveal—but Princess Hélène, with that calm dignity which easily replaced, when she chose, her witching *abandon,* turned the tables upon her detractors, and taught them how dangerous it may be to speak ill—of the wrong people.

A STUDY A LA LOUIS QUATORZE:

PENDANT TO A PORTRAIT BY MIGNARD.

SHE was surpassingly fair, Madame la Marquise. Mignard's portraits of her may fully rival his far-famed Portrait aux Amours. One of them has her painted as Venus Victrix, in the fashion of the day; one of them as herself, as Léontiné Opportune de Vivonne de Rennecourt, Marquise de la Rivière, with her crève-cœurs, and her diamonds, and her gay smile, showing her teeth, white and gleaming as the pearls mingled with her curls à la mode Montespan. Not Louise de la Beaume-le-Blanc, when the elm-boughs of St. Germain first flung their shadow on her golden head, before it bent for the Carmelite veil before the altar in the Rue St. Jacques; not Henriette d'Angleterre, when she listened to the trouvères' romances sung under her balcony at St. Cloud, before her young life was quenched by the hand of Morel and the order of Monsieur; not Athénaïs de Mortemart, when the liveries of lapis lazuli blue dashed through the streets of Paris, and the outriders cleared her path with their whips, before the game was lost, and the iron spikes were fastened inside the Montespan bracelets;—none of them, her contemporaries and acquaintances, eclipsed in loveliness Madame la Marquise. Had she but been fair instead of dark, the brown Bourbon eyes would have fallen on her of a surety; she would have outshone the lapis lazuli liveries with a royal guard of scarlet and gold, and her friend Athénaïs would have hated her as that fair lady hated "la sotte Fontanges" and "Saint Maintenon; for their sex, in all ages, have remembered the sage's precept, "Love as though you will one day hate," and invariably carry about with them, ready for need, a little essence of the acid of Malice, to sour in an instant the sugared cream of their loves and their friendships, if occasion rise up and the storm-cloud of rivalry loom in the horizon.

She was a beauty, Madame la Marquise, and she knew it, as she leaned out over the balcony of her château of Petite Forêt, that lay close to Clagny, under the shadow of the wood of Ville d'Avrée, outside the gates of Versailles, looking down on her bosquets, gardens, and terraces designed by Le Nôtre; for though she was alone, and there was nothing but her little dog Osmin to admire her white skin, and her dark eyes, and her beautiful hands and arms, and her diamond pendants that glittered in the moonlight, she smiled, her flashing triumphant smile, as she whispered to herself, "He is mine—mine! Bah! how can he help himself?" and pressed the ruby agraffe on her bosom with the look of a woman who knew no resistance, and brooked no reluctance to worship at her shrine.

Nothing ever opposed Madame la Marquise, and life went smoothly on with her. If Bossuet ever reproved her, it was in those *anathèmes cachés sous des fleurs d'oranger* in which that politic priest knew how to deal when expedient, however haughty and relentless to the world in general. M. le Marquis was not a savage eccentricity like M. de Pardaillon de Gondran, would never have dreamt of imitating the eccentricity of going into mourning, but if the Bourbon eye *had* fallen on his wife, would have said, like a loyal peer of France, that all his household treasures were the King's. Disagreeables fled before the scintillations of her smiles, as the crowd fled before her gilded carriage and her Flanders horses; and if ever a little fit of piety once in a while came over her, and Conscience whispered a mal à propos word in her delicate ear, she would give an enamelled lamp to Sainte Marie Reparatrice, by the advice of the Comtesse de Soubise and the Princesse de Monaco (who did such expiatory things themselves, and knew the comfort they afforded), and emerge from her repentance one of the most radiant of all the brilliant butterflies that fluttered their gorgeous wings in the Jardin de Flore under the sunny skies of Versailles.

The moonlight glittered on the fountains, falling with measured splash into their marble basins; the lime-leaves, faintly stirred by the sultry breezes, perfumed the night with their voluptuous fragrance, and the roses, twining round the carved and gilded balustrade, shook off their bowed heads drops of dew, that gleamed brightly as the diamonds among the curls of the woman who leaned above, resting her delicately rouged cheek on her jewelled hand, alone—a very rare circumstance with the Marquise de la Rivière. Osmin did not admire the rare solitude, for he rattled his silver bells and barked—an Italian greyhound's shrill, fretful bark—as his quick ears caught the distant sound of steps coming swiftly over the turf below, and his mistress smiled as she patted his head :

"Ah, Osmin !—here he is !"

A man came out from under the heavy shadow of limes and chesnuts, whose darkness the moon's rays had no power to pierce, crossed the lawn just under the balcony, and, coming up the terrace steps, stood near her—a man young, fair, handsome, whose age and form the uniform of a Captain of the Guards would have suited far better than the dark robes of a priest, which he wore; his lips were pressed closely together, and his face was pale with a pallor that consorted painfully with the warm passionate gleam of his eyes.

"So ! You are late in obeying my commands, monsieur."

Surely no other man in France would have stood silent beside her, under the spell of her dazzling glances, with such a picture before him as Madame la Marquise, in her azure silk and her point d'Angleterre, with her diamond pendants shaking among her hair, and her arched eyebrows lifted imperiously ? But he did ; his lips pressed closer, his eyes gleaming brighter. She changed her tone ; it was soft, seductive, reproachful, and the smile on her lips was tender—as tender as it ever could be with the mockery that always lay under it; and it broke at last the spell that bound him, as she whispered, "Ah ! Gaston, you love me no longer !"

"Not love you ? O God !"

They were but five words, but they told Madame la Marquise of a passion such as she had never roused, despite all her fascinations and intrigues, in the lovers that crowded round her in the salons within, or at Versailles, over the trees yonder where love was gallantry, and all was light comedy, with nothing so foolish as tragedy known.

He clasped her hands so closely that the sharp points of the diamond rings cut his own, though he felt them not.

"Not love you? Great Heaven! Not love you? Near you I forget my oath, my vows, my God!—I forget all, save you, whom I adore, as, till I met you, I adored my Church. Torture endured with you were dearer than Paradise won alone! Once with you, I have no strength, you bow me to your will as the wind bows the lime-leaf. Oh! woman, woman! could you have no mercy, that with crowds round you, daily worshipping your slightest smile, you must needs bow *me* down before your glance, as you bow those who have no oaths to bind them, no need to scourge themselves in midnight solitude for the mere crime of Thought? Had you no mercy, that with all hearts yours, you must have mine to sear it and destroy it? Have you not lives enough vowed to you, that you seek to blast mine for ever? I was content, untroubled, till I met you; no woman's glance stirred my heart, no woman's eyes haunted my vigils, no woman's voice came in memory between my soul and prayer! What devil tempted you to throw your spells over me—could you not leave *one* man in peace?"

"Ah bah! the tempted love the game of temptation generally full as well as the tempters!" thought Madame la Marquise, with an inward laugh.

Why did she allow such language to go unrebuked? Why did she, to whom none dared to breathe any but words the most polished, and love vows the most honeyed, permit herself to be addressed in such a strain? Possibly it was very new to her, such energy as this, and such an outbreak of passion amused her. At any rate she only drew her hands away, and her brilliant brown eyes filled with tears;—tears *were* to be had at Versailles when needed, even her friend Montespan knew how to use them as the worst weapons against the artillery of the Evêque de Condom—and her heart heaved under the filmy lace.

"Ah, Gaston! what words! 'What devil tempted me?' I know scarcely whether love be angel or devil; he seems either or both! But you love me little, unless in that name you recognise a plea for every madness and every thought!"

The scarlet blood flushed over his face, and his eyes shone and gleamed like fire, while he clenched his hands in a mortal anguish.

"Angel or devil? Ay! which indeed? The one when it comes to us, the other when it leaves us! You have roused love in me I shall bear to my grave; but what gage have I that you give it me back? How do I know but that even now you are trifling with me, mocking at me, smiling at the beardless priest who is unlearned in all the gay gallantries of libertine churchmen and soldierly courtiers? My Heaven! how know, as I stand beside you, whether you pity or disdain me, love or scorn me?"

The passionate words broke in a torrent from his lips, stirred the stillness of the summer eve with a fiery anguish little akin to it.

"Do I not love you?"

Her answer was simple; but as Léontine de Rennecourt spoke it, leaning her cheek against his breast, with her eyes dazzling as the diamonds in her hair, looking up into his by the light of the stars, they had an eloquence far more dangerous than speech, and delirious to the senses as magician's perfumes. His lips lingered on hers, and she felt the loud fast throbs of the heart she had won as he bent over her, pressing her closer and closer to him—vanquished and conquered, as men in all ages and of all creeds have been vanquished and conquered by women, all other thoughts fleeing away into oblivion, all fears dying out, all vows forgotten in the warm, living life of passion and of joy, that, for the first time in a brief life, flooded his heart with its golden voluptuous light.

"You love me? So be it," he murmured; "but beware what you do! my life lies in your hands, and you must be mine till death parts us?"

"Till my fancy change rather!" thought Madame la Marquise, as she put her jewelled hand on his lips, her hair softly brushing his cheek, with a touch as soft, and an odour as sweet, as the leaves of one of the roses twining below.

Two men strolling below under the limes of Petit Forêt—discussing the last scandals of Versailles, talking of the ascendancy of La Fontanges, of the Spanish dress his Majesty had reassumed to please her, of the Brinvilliers' Poudre de

Succession, of the new château given to Père de la Chaise, of D'Aubigny's last extravagance and Lauzun's last mot, and the last gossip about Bossuet and Mademoiselle de Mauléon, and all the chit-chat of that varied day, glittering with wit and prolific of poison—glanced up to the balcony by the light of the stars.

"That cursed priest!" muttered the younger, le Vicomte de Saint-Elix, as he struck the head off a lily with his delicate cane.

"In a fool's paradise! Ah-ha! Madame la Marquise!" laughed the other—the old Duc de Clos-Vougeot—taking a chocolate sweetmeat out of his emerald-studded bonbonnière as they walked on, while the lime-blossoms shook off in the summer night wind and dropped dead on the grass beneath, laughing at the story of the box D'Artagnan had found in Lauzun's rooms when he seized his papers, containing the portraits of sixty women of high degree who had worshipped the resistless Captain of the Guard, with critical and historical notices penned under each; notices D'Artagnan and his aide could not help indiscreetly retailing, in despite of the Bourbon command of secrecy—secrecy so necessary where sixty beauties and saints were involved!

"A fool's Paradise!" said the Duc de Clos Vougeot, tapping his bonbonnière, enamelled by Petitot: the Duc was old, and knew women well, and knew the value and length of a paradise dependent on that most fickle of butterflies—female fidelity; he had heard Ninon de Lenclos try to persuade Scarron's wife to become a coquette, and Scarron's wife in turn beseech Ninon to discontinue her coquetries; had seen that, however different their theories and practice, the result was the same; and already guessed right, that if Paris had been universally won by the one, its monarch would eventually be won by the other.

"A fool's paradise!"

The courtier was right, but the priest, had he heard him, would never have believed; *his* heaven shone in those dazzling eyes: till the eyes closed in death, his heaven was safe! He had never loved, he had seen nothing of women; he had come straight from the monastic gloom of a Dominican abbey, in the very heart of the South, down in Languedoc, where costly missals were his only idol, and rigid pietists, profoundly ignorant of the ways and thoughts of their brethren of Paris, had reared him up in anchorite rigidity, and scourged his mind with iron philosophies and stoic-like doctrines of self-mortification that would have repudiated the sophistries and ingenuities of Sanchez, Escobar, and Mascarenhas, as suggestions of the very Master of Evil himself. From the ascetic gloom of that Languedoc convent he had been brought straight, by superior will, into the glare of the life at Versailles, that brilliant, gorgeous, sparkling, bizarre life, scintillating with wit, brimful of intrigue, crowded with the men and women who formed the Court of that age and the History of the next; where he found every churchman an *abbé galant*, and heard those who performed the mass jest at it with those who attended it; where he found no lines marked of right and wrong, but saw them all fused in a gay, tangled web of two court colours—Expediency and Pleasure. A life that dazzled and tired his eyes, as the glitter of light in a room dazzles and tires the eyes of a man who comes suddenly in from the dark night air, till he grew giddy and sick, and in the midst of the gilded salons, or soft confessions of titled sinners, would ask himself if indeed he could be the same man who had sat calm and grave with the mellow sun streaming in on his missal-page in the monastic gloom of the Languedoc abbey but so few brief months before, when all this world of Versailles was unknown? The same man? Truly not—never again the same, since Madame la Marquise had bent her brown eyes upon him, been amused with his singular difference from all those around her, had loved him as women loved at Versailles, and bowed him down to her feet, before he guessed the name of the forbidden language that stirred in his heart and rushed to his lips, untaught and unbidden.

"A fool's paradise!" said the Duc, sagaciously tapping his gold bonbonnière. But many a paradise like it has dawned and faded, before and since the Versailles of Louis Quatorze.

He loved, and Madame la Marquise loved him. Through one brief tumult of struggle he passed: struggle between the creed of the Dominican abbey, where no sin would have been held so thrice accursed, so unpardonable, so deserving of the scourge and the stake as this—and the creed of the Bourbon Court, where churchmen's gallantries were every-day gossip; where the Abbé de Rancé, ere he founded the saintly gloom of La Trappe, scandalised town and court as much as Lauzun; where the Père de la Chaise smiled complacently on La Fontanges' ascendancy; where three nobles rushed to pick up the handkerchief of that royal confessor, who washed out with holy water the royal indiscretions, as you wash off grains of dust with perfumed water; where the great and saintly Bishop of Condom could be checked in a rebuking harangue, and have the tables turned on him by a mischievous reference to Mademoiselle de Mauléon; where life was intrigue for churchmen and laymen alike, and where the abbé's rochet and the cardinal's scarlet covered the same vices as were openly blazoned on the gold aiglettes of the Garde du Corps and the costly lace of the Chambellan du Roi. A storm, brief and violent as the summer storms that raged over Versailles, was roused between the conflicting thoughts at war within him, between the principles deeply rooted from long habit and stern belief, and the passions sprung up unbidden with the sudden growth and gorgeous glow of a tropical flower—a storm, brief and violent, a struggle, ended that night, when he stood on the balcony with the woman he loved, felt her lips upon his, and bowed down to her feet delirious and strengthless.

"I have won my wager with Adeline; I have vanquished *mon beau* De Launay," thought Madame la Marquise, smiling, two days after, as she sat, en negligé, in her broidered chair, pulling Osmin's ears, and stirring the frothy chocolate handed to her by her negro, Azor, brought over in the suite of the African embassy from Adra, full of monkeyish espièglerie, and covered with gems—a priceless dwarf, black as ink, and but two feet high, who could match any day with the Queen's little Moor. "He amuses me with his vows of eternal love. Eternal love?—how *de trop* we should find it, here in Versailles! But it is amusing enough to play at for a season. No, that is not half enough—he adores! This poor Gaston!"

So in the salons of Versailles, and in the world, where Ninon reigned, by the Court ladies, while they loitered in the new-made gardens of Marly, among other similar things jested of, was this new amour of Madame de la Rivière for the young Père de Launay. "She was always eccentric, and he *was* very handsome, and would have charming manners if he were not so grave and so silent," the women averred; while the young nobles swore that these meddling churchmen had always the best luck, whether in amatory conquest, or on fat lands and rich revenues. What the Priest of Languedoc thought a love that would outlast life, and repay him for peace of conscience and heaven both lost, was only one of the passing bubbles of gossip and scandal floating for an hour, amidst myriads like it, on the glittering, fast-rushing, diamond-bright waters of life at Versailles!

A new existence had dawned for him; far away in the dim dusky vista of forgotten things, though in reality barely distant a few short months, lay the old life in Languedoc, vague and unremembered as a passed dream; with its calm routine, its monastic silence, its unvarying alternations of study and prayer, its iron-bound thoughts, its rigid creed. It had sunk away as the peaceful grey twilight of a summer's night sinks away before the fiery burst of an artificial illumination, and a new life had dawned for him, radiant, tumultuous, conflicting, delicious—that dazzled his eyes with the magnificence of boundless riches and unrestricted extravagance; that charmed his intellect with the witty coruscations, the polished esprit, of an age unsurpassed for genius, grace, and wit; and that swayed alike his heart, his imagination, and his passions with the subtle intoxication of this syren of Love, whose forbidden song had never before, in faintest echo, fallen on his ear.

Far away in the dim, lifeless, pulseless past, sank the memory of the old Dominican abbey, of all it had taught him, of all it had exacted, in its iron, stoical, merciless creed. A new life had arisen for him, and Gaston de Launay, waking from the semi-slumber of the living death he had endured in Languedoc, and liked because he knew no other, was happy—happy as a prisoner is in the wild delight with which he welcomes the sunlight after lengthened imprisonment, happy as an opium-eater is in the delicious delirium that succeeds the lulling softness of the opiate.

"He loves me, poor Gaston! Bah! But how strangely he talks! If love were this fiery, changeless, earnest thing with us that it is with him, what in the world should we do with it? We should have to get a lettre de cachet for it, and forbid it the Court; send it in exile to Pignerol, as they have just done Lauzun. Love in earnest? We should lose the best spice for our wine, the best toy for our games, and, mon Dieu! what embroilments there would be! Love in earnest? Bagatelle! Louise de la Vallière shows us the folly of that;

but for its Quixotisms she would now be at Vaujours, instead of buried alive in that Rue St. Jacques, with nothing to do but to weep for 'Louison,' count her beads, and listen to M. de Condom's merciless eloquence! Like the king,

> J'aime qu'on m'aime, mais avec de l'esprit.

People have no right to reproach each other with inconstancy; one's caprices are not in one's own keeping; and one can no more help where one's fancy blows, than that lime-leaf can help where the breeze chooses to waft it. But poor Gaston! how make *him* comprehend that?" thought Madame la Marquise, as she turned, and smiled, and held out her warm jewelled hands, and listened once again to the words of the man who was in her power as utterly as the bird in the power of the snake when it has once looked up into the fatal eyes that lure it to its doom.

"You will love me ever?" he would ask, resting his lips on her white low brow.

"Ever!" would softly answer Madame la Marquise.

And her lover believed her: should his deity lie? He believed her! What did he, fresh from the solitude of his monastery, gloomy and severe as that of the Trappist abbey, with its perpetual silence, its lowered glances, its shrouded faces, its ever-present "memento mori," know of women's faith, of women's love, of the sense in which *they* meant that vow "for ever"? He believed her and never asked what would be at the end of a path strewn with such odorous flowers. Alone, it is true, in moments when he paused to think, he stood aghast at the abyss into which he had fallen, at the sin into which, a few moments before, haughty and stern in virtue against the temptation that had never entered his path, he would have defied devils in legion to have lured him, yet into which he had now plunged at the mere smile of a woman! Out of her presence, out of her spells, standing by himself under the same skies that had brooded over his days of peace in Languedoc, back on his heart, with a sickening anguish, would come the weight of his sin; the burden of his broken oaths, the scorch of that curse eternal which, by his creed, he held drawn down on him here and hereafter; and Gaston de Launay would struggle again against this idolatrous passion, which had come with its fell delusion betwixt him and his God; struggle—vainly, idly—struggle, only to hug closer the sin he loved while he loathed; only to drink deeper of the draught whose voluptuous perfume was poison; only to forget all, forsake all, dare all, at one whisper of her voice, one glance of her eyes, one touch of the lips whose caress he held would be bought by a curse through eternity.

Few women love aught "for ever," save, perchance, diamonds, lace, and their own beauty, and Madame la Marquise was not one of those few; certainly not—she had no desire to make herself singular in her generation, and could set fashions much more likely to find disciples, without reverting to anything so eccentric, plebeian, and out of date. Love *one* for ever! She would have thought it as terrible waste of her fascinations, as for a jewel to shine in the solitude of its case, looked on by only one pair of eyes, or for a priceless enamel, by Petitot, to be only worn next the heart, shrouded away from the light of day, hidden under the folds of linen and lace.

"Love one for ever?"—Madame la Marquise laughed at the thought, as she stood dressed for a ball, after assisting at the representation of a certain tragedy, called "Bérénice" (in which Mesdames Deshoulières and De Sévigné, despite their esprit, alone of all Paris and the Court could see no beauty), and glanced in the mirror at her radiant face, her delicate skin, her raven curls, with their pendants shaking, her snow-white arms, and her costly dress of the newest mode, its stomacher gleaming one mass of gems. "Love one for ever? The droll idea! Is it not enough that I have loved him once?"

It was more than enough for his rivals, who bitterly envied him; courtly abbés, with polished smiles, and young chanoines, with scented curls and velvet toques, courtiers, who piqued themselves on reputations only second to Lauzun's, and men of the world, who laughed at this new caprice of Madame la Marquise, alike bore no good-will to this Languedoc priest, and gave him a significant sneer, or a compliment that roused his blood to fire, and stung him far worse than more open insult, when they met in the salons, or crossed in the corridors, at Versailles or Petite Forêt.

"Those men! those men! Should he ever lose her to any one of them?" he would think over and over again, clenching his hand, in impotent agony of passion that he had not the sword and the license of a soldier to strike them on the lips with his glove for the smile with which they dared to speak her name; to make them wash out in blood under the trees, before the sun was up, the laugh, the sneer, the delicate satire, which were worse to bear than a blow to the man who could not avenge them.

"Pardieu! Madame must be very unusually faithful to her handsome Priest: she has smiled on no other for two months! What unparalleled fidelity!" said the Vicomte de Saint-Elix, with petulant irritation.

"Jealous, Léonce?" laughed the old Duc, whom he spoke to, tapping the medallion portrait on his bonbonnière. "Take comfort: when the weather has been so long fixed, it is always near a change. Ah, M. de Launay overhears! He looks as if he would slay us. Very unchristian in a priest!"

Gaston de Launay overheard, as he stood by a croisée at Petite Forêt, playing with Osmin—he liked even the dog, since the hand he loved so often lay on its slender neck, and toyed with its silver chain—and, sworn as he was to the service of his Church, sole mistress as his Church had been, till Léontine de Rennecourt's eyes had lured him to his desertion of her, apostate in his own eyes as such a thought confessed him to have grown, he now loathed the garb of a priest, that bound his hands from vengeance, and made him powerless before insult as a woman. Fierce, ruthless longing for revenge upon these men seized on him; devilish desires, the germ of which till that hour he never dreamt slumbered within him, woke up into dangerous, vigorous life. Had he lived in the world, its politic reserve, its courtly sneer, its light gallantries, that passed the time and flattered vanity, its dissimulated hate that smiled while plotting, and killed with poisoned bon-bons, would never have been learnt by him; and having long lived out of it, having been suddenly plunged into its whirl, not guessing its springs, ignorant of its diplomacies, its suave lies termed good breeding, its light philosophies, he knew nothing of the wisdom with which its wise men forsook their loves and concealed their hatreds. Both passions now sprang up in him at one birth, both the stronger for the long years in which a chill, artificial, but unbroken calm, had chained his very nature down, and fettered into an iron monotony, an unnatural and colourless tranquillity, a character originally impetuous and vivid, as the frost of a winter chill into one cold, even, glassy surface, the rapids of a tumultuous river. With the same force and strength with which, in the old days in Languedoc, he had idolised and served his Church, sparing himself no mortification, believing every iota of her creed, carrying out her slightest rule with merciless self-examination, so—the tide once turned the other way—so the priest now loved, so he now hated.

"He is growing exigeant, jealous, presuming; he amuses me no longer—he wearies. I must give him his congé," thought Madame la Marquise. "This play at eternal passion is very amusing for awhile, but like all things, gets tiresome when it has lasted some time. What does not? Poor Gaston, it is his provincial ideas, but he will soon rub such follies off, and find, like us all, that sincerity is troublesome, ever *de trop*, and never profitable. He loves me—but bah! so does Saint-Elix, so do they all, and a jealous husband like M. de Nesmond, *le drôle!* could scarcely be worse than my young De Launay is growing!"

And Madame la Marquise glanced at her face in the mirror, and wished she knew Madame de Maintenon's secret for the Bruvage Indien; wished she had one of the *clefs de faveur* to admit her to the Grande Salle du Parlement; wished she had the *couronne d'Agrippine* her friend Athénaïs had just shown her; wished Le Brun were not now occupied on the ceiling of the King's Grande Galerie, and were free to paint the frescoes of her own new-built chapel, wished a thousand unattainable things, as spoilt children of fortune will do, and swept down her château staircase a little out of temper—she could not have told why—to receive her guests at a fête given in honour of the marriage of Mademoiselle de Blois and the Prince de Conti.

There was the young Comte de Vermandois, who would recognise in the Dauphin no superiority save that of his elder brother; there was "*le petit bossu*," Prince Eugène, then soliciting the rochet of a Bishop, and equally ridiculed when he sought a post in the army; there was M. de Louvois, who had just signed the order for the Dragonades; there was the Palatine de Bavière, with her German brusquerie, who had clumsily tried to insult Madame de Montespan by coming into the salon with a great turnspit, led by a similar ribbon and called by the same name, in ridicule of the pet Montespan poodle; there was La Montespan herself, with her lovely gold hair, her dove's eyes, and her serpent's tongue; there was Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Grignan, the Duchesse de Richelieu and the Duchesse de Lesdiguières; there was Bussy Rabutin and Hamilton. Who was there not that was brilliant, that was distinguished, that was high in rank and famed in wit at the fête of Madame la Marquise?—Madame la Marquise, who floated through the crowd that glittered in her salon and gardens, who laughed and smiled, showing her dazzling white teeth, who had a little Cupid gleaming with jewels (emblematic enough of Cupid as he was known at Versailles) to present the Princesse de Conti with a bridal bouquet whose flowers were of pearls and whose leaves were of emeralds; who piqued herself that the magnificence of her fête was scarcely eclipsed by His Majesty himself; who yielded the palm neither to La Vallière's lovely daughter, nor to her friend Athénaïs, nor to any one of the beauties who shone with them, and whose likeness by Mignard laughed down from the wall where it hung, matchless double of her own matchless self.

The priest of Languedoc watched her, the relentless fangs of passion gnawing his heart, as the wolf the Spartan. For the first time he was forgotten! His idol passed him carelessly, gave him no glance, no smile, but lavished a thousand coquetries on Saint-Elix, on De Rohan-Soubise, on the boy Vermandois—on any who sought them. Once he addressed her. Madame la Marquise shrugged her snow-white shoulders, and arched her eyebrows with petulant irritation, and turned to laugh gaily at Saint-Elix, who was amusing her, and La Montespan, and Madame de Thianges, with some gay mischievous scandal concerning Madame de Lesdiguières and the Archbishop of Paris; for scandals, if not wholly new, are ever diverting when concerning an enemy, specially when dressed and served up with the piquant sauce of wit.

"I no longer then, madame, lead a dog's life in jealousy of this priest," whispered Saint-Elix, after other whispers, in the ear of Madame la Marquise. The Vicomte adored her, not truly in Languedoc fashion, but very warmly—à la mode de Versailles.

The Marquise laughed:

"Perhaps not! You know I bet Mme. de Montevreau that I would conquer him. I have won now. Hush! He is close. There will be a tragedy, *mon ami!*"

"M. le Vicomte, if you have the honour of a noble, the heart of a man, you fight me to-night. *I* seek no shelter under my cloth!"

Saint-Elix turned as he heard the words, laughed scornfully, and signed the speaker away with an insolent sneer.

"Bah! *Révérend Père!* we do not fight with women and churchmen!"

The fête was ended at last, the lights that had gleamed among the limes and chestnuts had died out, the gardens and salons were emptied and silent, the little Cupid had laid aside his weighty jewelled wings, the carriages with their gorgeous liveries, their outriders, and their guards of honour, had rolled from the gates of Petite Forêt to the Palace of Versailles. Madame la Marquise stood alone once more in the balcony of her salons, leaning her white arms on its gilded balustrade, looking down on to the gardens beneath, silvered with the breaking light of the dawn, smiling, her white teeth gleaming between her parted rose-hued lips, and thinking of what? Who shall say?

Still, still as death lay the gardens below, that an hour ago had been peopled with a glittering crowd, re-echoing with music, laughter, witty response, words of intrigue. Where the lights had shone on diamonds and pearl-broidered trains, on softly rouged cheeks, and gold-laced coats, on jewelled swords and broideries of gold, the grey hue of the breaking day now only fell on the silvered leaves of the limes, the turf wet with dew, the drooped heads of the Provence roses; and Madame la Marquise, standing alone, started as a step through the salon within broke the silence.

"Madame, will you permit me a word *now?*"

Gaston de Launay took her hands off the balustrade, and held them tight in his, while his voice sounded, even in his own ears, strangely calm, yet strangely harsh:

"Madame, you love me no longer?"

"Monsieur, I do not answer questions put to me in such a manner."

She would have drawn her hands away, but he held them in a fierce grasp till her rings cut his skin as they had done once before.

"No trifling! Answer—yes or no!"

"Well! 'no,' then, monsieur. Since you *will* have the truth, do not blame me if you find it uncomplimentary and unacceptable."

He let go her hands and reeled back, staggered as if struck by a shot.

"Mon Dieu! it is true—you love me no longer! And you tell it me *thus!*"

Madame la Marquise, for an instant, was silenced and touched; for the words were uttered with the faint cry of a man in agony, and she saw, even by the dim twilight of dawn, how livid his lips turned, how ashy grey grew the hue of his face. But she smiled, playing with Osmin's new collar of pearls and coral.

"Tell it you 'thus?' I would not have told it you 'thus,' monsieur, if you had been content with a hint, and had not evinced so strong a desire for candour undisguised; but if people will not comprehend a delicate suggestion, they must be wounded by plainer truths—it is their own fault. Did you think I was like a little shepherdess in a pastoral, to play the childish game of constancy without variations? Had you presumption enough to fancy you could amuse me for ever——"

He stopped her, his voice broken and hoarse, as he gasped for breath.

"Silence! Woman, have you no mercy? For you—for such as you—I have flung away heaven, steeped myself in sin, lost my church, my peace, my all—forfeited all right to the reverence of my fellows, all hope for the smile of my God! For you—for such as you—I have become a traitor, a hypocrite, an apostate, whose prayers are insults, whose professions are lies, whose oaths are perjury! At your smile, I have flung away eternity; for your kiss, I have risked my life here, my life hereafter; for your love I held no price too vast to pay; weighed with it, honour, faith, heaven, all seemed valueless—all were forgotten! You lured me from tranquil calm, you broke in on the days of peace which but for you were unbroken still, you haunted my prayers, you placed yourself between Heaven and me, you planned to conquer my anchorite's pride, you wagered you would lure me from my priestly vows, and yet you have so little mercy, that when your bet is won, when your amusement grows stale, when the victory grows valueless, you can turn on me with words like these without one self-reproach?"

"Ma foi, monsieur! it is you who may reproach yourself, not I," cried his hearer insolently. "Are you so very provincial still, that you are ignorant that when a lover has ceased to please he has to blame his own lack of power to retain any love he may have won, and is far too well bred to utter a complaint? Your language is very new to me. Most men, monsieur, would be grateful for my slightest preference; I permit none to rebuke me for either giving or withdrawing it."

The eyes of Madame la Marquise sparkled angrily, and the smile on her lips was a deadly one, full of irony, full of malice. As he beheld it, the scales fell at last from the eyes of Gaston de Launay, and he saw what this woman was whom he had worshipped with such mad, blind, idolatrous passion.

He bowed his head with a low, broken moan, as a man stunned by a mortal blow; while Madame la Marquise stood playing with the pearl-and-coral chain, and smiling the malicious and mischievous smile that showed her white teeth, as they are shown in the portrait by Mignard.

"*Comme les hommes sont fous!*" laughed Madame la Marquise.

He lifted his eyes, and looked at her as she stood in the faint light of the dawn, with her rich dress, her gleaming diamonds, her wicked smile, her matchless beauty; and the passion in him broke out in a bitter cry:

"God help me! my sin has brought home its curse!"

He bent over her, his burning lips scorching her own like fire, holding her in one last embrace, that clasped her in a vice of iron she had no power to break.

"Angel! devil! temptress! *This* for what I have deemed thee—*that* for what thou art!"

He flung her from him with unconscious violence, maddened with pain, as a man by the blow that has blinded him, and left her—lying where she fell.

The grey silvery dawn rose, and broke into the warmth and sunlight of a summer day; the deer nestled in their couches under the chequered shadows of the woodlands round, and the morning chimes were rung in musical cadence from the campanile of the château; the Provence roses tossed their delicate heads, joyously shaking the dew off their scented petals; the blossoms of the limes fell in a fragrant shower on to the turf below, and the boughs, swayed softly by the wind, brushed their leaves against the sparkling waters of the fountains; the woods and gardens of Petite Forêt lay, bright and laughing, in the mellow sunshine of the new day to which the world was waking. And with his face turned up to the sky, clasped in his hand a medallion enamel, on which was painted the head of a woman, the grass and ferns where he had fallen stained crimson with his life-blood, lay a dead man, while in his bosom nestled a little dog, moaning piteous, plaintive cries, and vainly seeking its best to wake him to the day that for him would never dawn.

When her household, trembling, spread the news that the dead priest had been found lying under the limes, slain by his own hand, and it reached Madame la Marquise in her private chambers, she was startled, shocked, wept, hiding her radiant eyes in her broidered handkerchief, and called Azor, and bade him bring her her flask of scented waters, and bathed her eyes, and turned them dazzling bright on Saint-Elix, and stirred her chocolate, and asked the news. "*On peut être émue aux larmes et aimer le chocolat,*" thought Madame la Marquise, with her friend Montespan:—while, without, under the waving shadow of the linden boughs, with the sunlight streaming round him, the little dog nestling in his breast, refusing to be comforted, lay the man whom she had murdered.

The portrait by Mignard still hangs on the walls of the château, and in its radiant colours Madame la Marquise still lives, fair type of her age, smiling her victorious smile, with the diamonds shining among her hair, and her brilliant eyes flashing defiance, irony, and coquetry as of yore, when she reigned amidst the beauties of Versailles;—and in the gardens beyond, in the summer nights, the lime boughs softly shake their fragrant flowers on the turf, and the moonlight falls in hushed and mournful calm, streaming through the network of the boughs on to the tangled mass of violets and ferns that has grown up in rank luxuriance over the spot where Gaston de Launay died.

A LINE IN THE "DAILY:"

WHO DID IT, AND WHO WAS DONE BY IT.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Fairlie's troop of Horse Artillery is ordered to Norwich to replace the 12th Lancers, en route to Bombay." Those three lines in the papers spread dismay into the souls of Norfolk young ladies, and no less horror into ours, for we were very jolly at Woolwich, could run up to the Clubs and down to Epsom, and were far too material not to prefer ball-room belles to bluebells, strawberry-ice to fresh hautboys, the sparkle of champagne-cup to all the murmurs of the brooks, and the flutter of ballet-girls' wings to all the rustle of forest leaves. But, unhappily, the Ordnance Office is no more given to considering the feelings of their Royal Gunners than the Horse Guards the individual desires of the two other Arms; and off we went to Norwich, repining bitterly, or, in modern English, swearing hard at our destinies, creating an immense sensation with our 6-pounders, as we flatter ourselves the Royals always contrive to do, whether on fair friends or fierce foes, and were looked upon spitefully by the one or two young ladies whose hearts were gone eastwards with the Twelfth, smilingly by the one or two hundred who, having fruitlessly laid out a great deal of tackle on the Twelfth, proceeded to manufacture fresh flies to catch us.

We soon made up, I think, to the Norwich girls for the loss of the Twelfth. They set dead upon Fairlie, our captain, a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel, and a C.B. for "services in India," where he had rivalled Norman Ramsay's ancient fame at Fuentes d'Onor had had a ball put in his hip, and had come home again to be worshipped by the women for his romantic reputation. They made an immense deal, too, of Levison Courtenay, the beauty of the troop, and called Belle in consequence; who did not want any flummery or flirtation to increase his opinion of himself, being as vain of his almond eyes as any girl just entered as the favourite for the season. There were Tom Gower, too, a capital fellow, with no nonsense about him, who made no end of chaff of Belle Courtenay; and Little Nell, otherwise Harcourt Poultenay Nelson, who had by some miracle escaped expulsion both from Carshalton and the College; and *votre humble serviteur* Phil Hardinge, first lieutenant, and one or two other fellows, who having cut dashing figures at our Woolwich reviews, cantering across Blackheath Common, or waltzing with dainty beauties down our mess-room, made the Artillery welcome in that city of shawls and oratorios, where, according to the Gazetteer, no virtuous person ought to dwell, that volume, with characteristic lucidity, pronouncing its streets "ill disposed."

The Clergy asked us to their rectories—a temptation we were often proof against, there being three noticeable facts in rectories, that the talk is always slow, "the Church" being present, and having much the same chilling effect as the presence of a chaperone at a tête-à-tête; the daughters generally ugly, and, from leading the choir at morning services, perfectly convinced that they sing like Clara Novello, and that the harmonium is a most delightful instrument; and, last and worst, the wines are almost always poor, except the port which the reverend host drinks himself, but which, Dieu merci! we rarely or never touch.

The County asked us, too; and there we went for good hock, tolerable-looking women, and first-rate billiard-tables. For the first month we were in Norfolk we voted it unanimously the most infernally slow and hideous county going; and I dare say we made ourselves uncommonly disagreeable, as people, if they are not pleased, be they ever so well bred, have a knack of doing.

Things were thus quiescent and stagnant, when Fairlie one night at mess told us a bit of news.

"Old fellows, whom do you think I met to-day?"

"How should we know? Cut along."

"The Swan and her Cygnets."

"The Vanes? Oh, bravo!" was shouted at a chorus, for the dame and demoiselles in question we had known in town that winter, and a nicer, pleasanter, faster set of women I never came across. "What's bringing them down here, and how's Geraldine?"

"Vane's come into his baronetcy, and his place is close by Norwich," said Fairlie; "his wife's health has been bad, and so they left town early; and Geraldine is quite well, and counting on haymaking, she informed me."

"Come, that is good news," said Belle, yawning. "There'll be one pretty woman in the county, thank Heaven! Poor little Geraldine! I must go and call on her to-morrow."

"She has existed without your calls, Belle," said Fairlie, dryly, "and don't look as if she pined after you."

"My dear fellow, how should you know?" said Belle, in no wise disconcerted. "A little rouge soon makes 'em look well, and as for smiles, they'll smile while they're dying for you. Little Vane and I were always good friends, and shall be again—if I care."

"Conceited owl!" said Fairlie, under his moustaches. "I'm sorry to hurt your feelings, then, but your pretty 'friend' never asked after you."

"I dare say not," said Belle, complacently. "Where a woman's most interested she's always quietest, and Geraldine——"

"Lady Vane begged me to tell you you will always be welcome over there, old fellows," said Fairlie, remorselessly cutting him short. "Perhaps we shall find something to amuse us better than these stiltified Chapter dinners."

The Vanes of whom we talked were uncommonly pleasant people whom we had known at Lee, where Vane, a Q.C., then resided, his prospective baronetcy being at that time held by a third or fourth cousin. Fairlie had known the family since his boyhood; there were four daughters, tall graceful women, who had gained themselves and mother the nickname of The Swan and her Cygnets; and then there were twins, a boy of eighteen, who'd just left Eton; and the girl Geraldine, a charming young lady, whom Belle admired more warmly than that dandy often admired anybody besides himself, and whom Fairlie liked cordially, having had many a familiar bit of fun with her, as he had known her ever since he was a dashing cadet, and she made her *début* in life in the first column of the *Times.* Her sisters were handsome women; but Geraldine was bewitching. A very pleasant family they were, and a vast acquisition to us. Miss Geraldine flirted to a certain extent with us all, but chiefly with the Colonel, whenever he was to be had, those two having a very free-and-easy, familiar style of intercourse, owing to old acquaintance; and Belle spent two hours every evening on his toilette when we were going to dine there, and vowed she was a "deuced pretty little puss. Perhaps she might—he wasn't sure, but perhaps (it would be a horrid sacrifice), if he was with her much longer, he wasn't sure she mightn't persuade him to take compassion upon her, he *was* so weak where women were concerned!"

"What a conceit!" said Fairlie thereat, with a contemptuous twist of his moustaches and a shrug of his shoulders to me. "I must say, if I were a woman, I shouldn't feel over-flattered by a lover who admired his own beauty first, and mine afterwards. Not that I pretend to understand women."

By which speech I argued that his old playmate Geraldine hadn't thrown hay over the Colonel, and been taught billiards by him, and ridden his bay mare over the park in her evening dress, without interesting him slightly; and that—though I don't think he knew it—he was deigning to be a trifle jealous of his Second Captain, the all-mighty conqueror Belle.

"What fools they must be that put in these things!" yawned Belle one morning, reading over his breakfast coffee in the *Daily Pryer* one of those "advertisements for a wife" that one comes across sometimes in the papers, and that make us, like a good many other things, agree with Goldsmith:

Reason, they say, belongs to man,
But let them prove it if they can;
Wise Aristotle and Smiglicious,
By ratiocinations specious,
Have strove to prove with great precision,
With definition and division,
Homo est ratione præditum,
But for my soul I cannot credit 'em.

"What fools they must be!" yawned Belle, wrapping his dressing-gown round him, and coaxing his perfumy whiskers under his velvet smoking-cap. Belle was always inundated by smoking-caps in cloth and velvet, silk and beads, with blue tassels, and red tassels, and gold tassels, embroidered and filigreed, rounded and pointed; he had them sent to him by the dozen, and pretty good chaff he made of the donors. "Awful fools? The idea of advertising for a wife, when the only difficulty a man has is to keep from being tricked into taking one. I bet you, if I did like this owl here, I should have a hundred answers; and if it were known to be I——"

"Little Geraldine's self for a candidate, eh?" asked Tom Gower.

"Very possible," said Belle, with a self-complacent smile. "She's a fast little thing, don't check at much, and she's deucedly in love with me, poor little dear—almost as much trouble to me as Julia Sedley was last season. That girl all but proposed to me; she did, indeed. Never was nearer coming to grief in my life. What will you bet me that, if I advertise for a wife, I don't hoax lots of women?"

"I'll bet you ten pounds," said I, "that you don't hoax one!"

"Done!" said Belle, stretching out his hand for a dainty memorandum-book, gift of the identical Julia Sedley aforesaid, and entering the bet in it—"done! If I'm not asked to walk in the Close at noon and look out for a pink bonnet and a black lace cloak, and to loiter up the market-place till I come across a black hat and blue muslin dress; if I'm not requested to call at No. 20, and to grant an interview at No. 84; if I'm not written to by Agatha A. with hazel, and Belinda B. with black, eyes—all coming after me like flies after a sugar-cask, why you shall have your ten guineas, my boy, and my colt into the bargain. Come write out the advertisement, Tom—I can't, it's too much trouble; draw it mild, that's all, or the letters we shall get will necessitate an additional Norwich postman. By George, what fun it will be to do the girls! Cut along, Tom, can't you?"

"All right," said Gower, pushing away his coffee-cup, and drawing the ink to him. "Head it 'MARRIAGE,' of course?"

"Of course. That word's as attractive to a woman as the belt to a prize-fighter, or a pipe of port to a college fellow."

"'MARRIAGE.—A Bachelor——'"

"Tell 'em a military man; all girls have the scarlet fever."

"Very well—'an Officer in the Queen's, of considerable personal attractions'"

"My dear fellow, pray don't!" expostulated Belle, in extreme alarm; "we shall have such swarms of 'em!"

"No, no! we must say that," persisted Gower—"'personal attractions, aged eight-and-twenty——'"

"Can't you put it, 'in the flower of his age,' or his 'sixth lustre?' It's so much more poetic."

"'—the flower of his age,' then (that'll leave 'em a wide range from twenty to fifty, according to their taste), 'is desirous of meeting a young lady of beauty, talent, and good family,'—eh?"

"Yes. All women think themselves beauties, if they're as ugly as sin. Milliners and confectioner girls talk Anglo-French, and rattle a tin-kettle piano after a fashion, and anybody buys a 'family' for half-a-crown at the Heralds' Office —so fire away."

"'—who, feeling as he does the want of a kindred heart and sympathetic soul, will accord him the favour of a letter or an interview, as a preliminary to the greatest step in life.'"

"A step—like one on thin ice—very sure to bring a man to grief," interpolated Belle. "Say something about property; those soul-and-spirit young ladies generally keep a look-out for tin, and only feel an elective affinity for a lot of debentures and consols."

"'The advertiser being a man of some present and still more prospective wealth, requires no fortune, the sole objects of his search being love and domestic felicity.' Domestic felicity—how horrible! Don't it sound exactly like the end of a lady's novel, where the unlucky hero is always brought to an untimely end in a 'sweet cottage on the banks of the lovely Severn'?"

"'Domestic felicity'—bah! What are you writing about?" yawned Belle. "I'd as soon take to teetotalism; however, it'll tell in the advertisement. Bravo, Tom, that will do. Address it to 'L.C., care of Mrs. Greene, confectioner, St. Giles-street, Norwich.' Miss Patty 'll take the letters in for me, though not if she knew their errand. Tip seven and sixpence with it, and send it to the *Daily Pryer.*"

We did send it to the *Daily*, and in that broadsheet we all of us read it two mornings after.

MARRIAGE.—A Bachelor, an Officer of the Queens, of considerable personal attractions, and in the flower of his age, is desirous of meeting a young lady of beauty, accomplishments, and good family, who, feeling as he does the want of a kindred heart and sympathetic soul, will accord him the favour either of a letter or an interview, as a preliminary to the greatest step in life. The advertiser being a man of some present and still more prospective wealth, requires no fortune, the sole objects of his search being love and domestic felicity. Address, L.C., care of Mrs. Greene, confectioner, St. Giles-street, Norwich.

"Whose advertisement do you imagine that is?" said Fairlie, showing the *Daily* to Geraldine, as he sat with her and her sisters under some lilac and larch trees in one of the meadows of Fern Chase, which had had the civility, Geraldine said, to yield a second crop of hay expressly for her to have the pleasure of making it. She leaned down towards him as he lay on the grass, and read the advertisement, looking uncommonly pretty in her dainty muslin dress, with its fluttering mauve ribbons, and a wreath she had just twisted up, of bluebells and pinks and white heaths which Fairlie had gathered as he lay, put on her bright hair. We called her a little flirt, but I think she was an unintentional one; at least her agaceries were, all as unconscious as they were—her worst enemies (*i.e.* plain young ladies) had to allow— unaffected.

"How exquisitely sentimental! Is it yours?" she asked, with demure mischief.

"Mine!" echoed Fairlie, with supreme scorn.

"It's some one's here, because the address is at Mrs. Greene's. Come, tell me at once, monsieur."

"The only fool in the artillery," said Fairle, curtly: "Belle Courtenay."

"Captain Courtenay!" echoed Geraldine, with a little flush on her cheeks, caused, perhaps, by the quick glance the Colonel shot at her as he spoke.

"Captain Courtenay!" said Katherine Vane. "Why, what can he want with a wife? I thought he had *l'embarras de choix* offered him in that line; at least, so he makes out himself."

"I dare say," said Fairlie, dryly, "it's for a bet he's made, to see how many women he can hoax, I believe."

"How can you tell it is a hoax?" said Geraldine, throwing cowslips at her greyhound. "It may be some medium of intercourse with some one he really cares for, and who may understand his meaning."

"Perhaps you are in his confidence, Geraldine, or perhaps you are thinking of answering it yourself?"

"Perhaps," said the young lady, waywardly, making the cowslip into a ball; "there might be worse investments. Your *béte noire* is strikingly handsome; he is the perfection of style; he is going to be Equerry to the Prince; his mother is just married again to Lord Chevenix; he did not name half his attractions in that line in the *Daily.*"

With which Geraldine rushed across the meadow after the greyhound and the cowslip ball, and Fairlie lay quiet, plucking up the heaths by the roots. He lay there still, when the cowslip ball struck him a soft fragrant blow against his lips, and knocked the Cuba from between his teeth.

"Why don't you speak?" asked Geraldine plaintively. "You are not half so pleasant to play with as you were before you went to India, and I was seven or eight, and you had La Grace, and battledore and shuttlecock, and cricket, and all sorts of games with me in the old garden at Charlton."

He might have told her she was much less dangerous then than now; he was not disposed to flatter her, however. So he answered her quietly,

"I preferred you as you were then."

"Indeed!" said Geraldine, with a hot colour in her cheeks. "I do not think there are many who would indorse your complimentary opinion."

"Possibly," said Fairlie, coldly.

She took up her cowslips, and hit him hard with them several times.

"Don't speak in that tone. If you dislike me, you can say so in warmer words, surely."

Fairlie smiled *malgré lui.*

"What a child you are, Geraldine! but a child that is a very mischievous coquette, and has learned a hundred tricks and *agaceries* of which my little friend of seven or eight knew nothing. I grant you were not a quarter so charming, but you were, I am afraid—more true."

Geraldine was ready to cry, but she was in a passion, nevertheless; such a hot and short-lived passion as all women of any spirit can go into on occasion, when they are unjustly suspected.

"If you choose to think so of me you may," she said, with immeasurable hauteur, sweeping away from him, her mauve ribbons fluttering disdainfully. "I, for one, shall not try to undeceive you."

The next night we all went up to the ball at the Vanes', to drink Rhenish, eat ices, quiz the women, flirt with the pretty ones in corners, lounge against doorways, criticise the feet in the waltzing as they passed us, and do, in fact, anything but what we went to do—dance—according to our custom in such scenes.

The Swan and her Cygnets looked very stunning; they "made up well," as ladies say when they cannot deny that another is good-looking, but qualify your admiration by an assurance that she is shockingly plain in the morning, and owes all to her milliner and maids. Geraldine, who, by the greatest stretch of scepticism, could not be supposed "made up," was bewitching, with her sunshiny enjoyment of everything, and her untiring waltzing, going for all the world like a spinning-top, only a top tires, and she did not. Belle, who made a principle of never dancing except under extreme coercion by a very pretty hostess, could not resist her, and Tom Gower, and Little Nell, and all the rest, not to mention half Norfolk, crowded round her; all except Fairlie, who leaned against the doorway, seeming to talk to her father or the members, or anybody near, but watching the young lady for all that, who flirted not a little, having in her mind the scene in the paddock of yesterday, and wishing, perhaps, to show him that if he did not admire her more than when she was eight, other men had better taste.

She managed to come near him towards the end of the evening, sending Belle to get her an ice.

"Well," she said, with a comical *pitié d'elle-même,* "do you dislike me so much that you don't mean to dance with me at all? Not a single waltz all night?"

"What time have you had to give me?" said Fairlie, coldly. "You have been surrounded all the evening."

"Of course I have. I am not so disagreeable to other gentlemen as I am to you! But I could have made time for you if you had only asked for it. At your own ball last week you engaged me beforehand for six waltzes."

Fairlie relented towards her. Despite her flirting, he thought she did not care for Belle after all.

"Well," he said, smiling, "will you give me one after supper?"

"You told me you shouldn't dance, Colonel Fairlie," said Katherine Vane, smiling.

"One can't tell what one mayn't do under temptation," said Fairlie, smiling too. "A man may change his mind, you know."

"Oh yes," cried Geraldine; "a man may change his mind, and we are expected to be eminently grateful to him for his condescension; but if *we* change our minds, how severely we are condemned for vacillation: 'So weak!' 'Just like women!' 'Never like the same thing two minutes, poor things!'"

"You don't like the same thing two minutes, Geraldine," laughed Fairlie; "so I dare say you speak feelingly."

"I changeable! I am constancy itself!"

"Are you? You know what the Italians say of azure eyes?"

"But I don't believe it, monsieur!" cried Geraldine:

"Blue eyes beat black fifty to seven,
For black's of hell, but blue's of heaven!"

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle," laughed Fairlie:

"Done, by the odds, it is not true!
One devil's black, but scores are blue!"

He whirled her off into the circle in the midst of our laughter at their ready wit. Soon after he bid her good night, but he found time to whisper as he did so,

"You are more like *my* little Geraldine to-night!"

The look he got made him determine to make her his little Geraldine before much more time had passed. At least, he drove us back to Norwich in what seemed very contented silence, for he smoked tranquilly and let the horses go their own pace—two certain indications that a man has pleasant thoughts to accompany him.

I do not think he listened to Belle's, and Gower's, and my conversation, not even when Belle took his weed out of his mouth and announced the important fact: "Hardinge! my ten guineas, if you please. I've had a letter!"

"What! an answer? By Jove!"

"Of course, an answer. I tell you all the pretty women in the city will know my initials, and send after me. I only hope they *will* be pretty, and then one may have a good deal of fun. I was in at Greene's this morning having mock-turtle, and talking to Patty (she's not bad looking, that little girl, only she drops her 'h's' so. I'm like that fellow—what's his name?—in the 'Peau de Chagrin;' I don't admire my loves in cotton prints), when she gave me the letter. I left it on my dressing-table, but you can see it to-morrow. It's a horrid red daubed-looking seal, and no crest; but that she mightn't use for fear of being found out, and the writing is disguised, but that it would be. She *says* she has the three requisites; but where's the woman that don't think herself Sappho and Galatea combined? And she was nineteen last March. Poor little devil! she little thinks how she'll be done. I'm to meet her on the Yarmouth road at two, and to look out for a lady standing by the first milestone. Shall we go, Tom? It may lead to something amusing, you know, though certainly it won't lead to marriage."

"Oh! we'll go, old fellow," said I. "Deuce take you, Belle! what a lucky fellow you are with the women."

"Luckier than I want to be," yawned Belle. "It's a horrid bore to be so set upon. One may have too much of a good thing, you know."

At two the day after, having refreshed ourselves with a light luncheon at Mrs. Greene's, of lobster salad and pale ale, Belle, Gower, and I buttoned our gloves and rode leisurely up the road.

"How my heart palpitates!" said Belle, stroking his moustaches with a bored air. "How can I tell, you know, but what I may be going to see the arbiter of my destiny. Men have been tricked into all sorts of tomfoolery by their compassionate feelings. And then—if she should squint or have a turn-up nose! Good Heavens! what a fearful idea! I've often wondered when I've seen men with ugly wives how they could have been cheated into taking 'em; they couldn't have done it in their senses, you know, nor yet with their eyes open. You may depend they took 'em to church in a state of coma from chloroform. 'Pon my word I feel quite nervous. You don't think the girl will have a parson and a register hid behind the milestone, do you?"

"If she should, it won't be legal without a license, thanks to the fools who turn Hymen into a tax-gatherer, and won't let a fellow make love without he asks leave of the Archbishop of Canterbury," said Gower. "Hallo, Belle, here's the milestone, but where's the lady?"

"Virgin modesty makes her unpunctual," said Belle, putting up his eye-glass.

"Hang modesty!" swore Tom. "It's past two, and we left a good quarter of that salad uneaten. Confound her!"

"There are no signs of her," said I. "Did she tell you her dress, Belle?"

"Not a syllable about it; only mentioned a milestone, and one might have found a market-woman sitting on that."

"Hallo! here's something feminine. Oh, good gracious! this can't be it, it's got a brown stuff dress on, and a poke straw bonnet and a green veil. No, no, Belle. If you married her, that *would* be a case of chloroform."

But the horrible brown stuff came sidling along the road with that peculiar step belonging to ladies of a certain age, characterised by Patty Greene as "tipputting," sweeping up the dust with its horrible folds, making straight *en route* for Belle, who was standing a little in advance of us. Nineteen! Good Heavens! she must have been fifty if she was a day, and under her green veil was a chestnut front—yes, decidedly, a front—and face yellow as a Canadian's, and wrinkled as Madame Pipelet's, made infinitely worse by that sweet maiden simper and assumed juvenility common to *vieilles filles.* Up she came towards poor Belle, who involuntarily retreated step by step till he had backed against the milestone, and could get no further, while she smiled up in his handsome face, and he stared down in her withered one, with the most comical expression of surprise, dismay, and horror that had ever appeared on our "beauty's" impassive features.

"Are you—the—the—L. C.?" demanded the maiden of ten lustres, casting her eyes to the ground with virgin modesty.

"L. C. ar——My dear madam, I don't quite understand you," faltered Belle, taken aback for once in his life.

"Was it not you," faltered the fair one, shaking out a pocket-handkerchief that sent a horrible odour of musk to the olfactory nerves of poor Belle, most fastidious connoisseur in perfumes, "who advertised for a kindred heart and sympathetic soul!"

"Really, my good lady," began Belle, still too aghast by the chestnut front to recover his self-possession.

"Because," simpered his inamorata, too agitated by her own feelings to hear his horrible appellative, keeping him at bay there with the fatal milestone behind him and the awful brown stuff in front of him—"because I, too, have desired to meet with some elective affinity, some spirit-tie that might give me all those more subtle sympathies which can never be found in the din and bustle of the heartless world; I, too, have pined for the objects of your search—love and domestic happiness. Oh, blessed words, surely we might—might we not?——"

She paused, overcome with maidenly confusion, and buried her face in the musk-scented handkerchief. Tom and I, where we stood *perdus*, burst into uncontrollable shouts of laughter. Poor Belle gave one blank look of utter terror at the *tout ensemble* of brown stuff, straw poke, and chestnut front. He forgot courtesy, manners, and everything else; his lips were parted, with his small white teeth glancing under his silky moustaches, his sleepy eyes were open wide, and as the maiden lady dropped her handkerchief, and gave him what she meant to be the softest and most tender glance, he turned straight round, sprang on his bay, and rushed down the Yarmouth road as if the whole of the dignitaries of the church and law were tearing after him to force him *nolens volens* into carrying out the horrible promise in his cursed line in the *Daily*. What was Tom's and my amazement to see the maiden lady seat herself astride on the milestone, and join her cachinnatory shouts to ours, fling her green veil into a hawthorn-tree, jerk her bonnet into our faces, kick off her brown stuff into the middle of the road, tear off her chestnut front and yellow mask, and perform a frantic war-dance on the roadside turf. No less a person than that mischievous monkey and inimitable mimic Little Nell!

"You young demon!" shouted Gower, shrieking with laughter till he cried. "A pretty fellow you are to go tricking your senior officer like this. You little imp, how can you tell but what I shall court-martial you to-morrow?"

"No, no, you won't?" cried Little Nell, pursuing his frantic dance. "Wasn't it prime! wasn't it glorious? wasn't it worth the Kohinoor to see? You won't go and peach, when I've just given you a better farce than all old Buckstone's? By Jove! Belle's face at my chestnut front! This'll be one of his prime conquests, eh? I say, old fellows, when Charles Mathews goes to glory, don't you think I might take his place, and beat him hollow, too?"

When we got back to barracks we found Belle prostrate on his sofa, heated, injured, crestfallen, solacing himself with Seltzer-and-water, and swearing away anything but mildly at that "wretched old woman." He bound us over to secrecy, which, with Little Nell's confidence in our minds, we naturally promised. Poor Belle! to have been made a fool of before two was humiliation more than sufficient for our all-conquering *lion*. For one who had so often refused to stir across a ball-room to look at a Court beauty, to have ridden out three miles to see an old maid of fifty with a chestnut front! The insult sank deep into his soul, and threw him into an abject melancholy, which hung over him all through mess, and was not dissipated till a letter came to him from Mrs. Greene's, when we were playing loo in Fairlie's room. That night Fairlie was in gay spirits. He had called at Fern Chase that morning, and though he had not been able to see Geraldine alone, he had passed a very pleasant couple of hours there, playing pool with her and her sisters, and had been as good friends as ever with his old playmate.

"Well, Belle," said he, feeling good-natured even with him that night, "did you get any good out of your advertisement? Did your lady turn out a very pretty one?"

"No; deuced ugly, like the generality," yawned poor Belle, giving me a kick to remind me of my promise. Little Nell was happily about the city somewhere with Pretty Face, or the boy would scarcely have kept his countenance.

"What amusement you can find in hoaxing silly women," said Fairlie, "is incomprehensible to me. However, men's tastes differ, happily. Here comes another epistle for you, Belle; perhaps there's better luck for you there."

"Oh! I shall have no end of letters. I shan't answer any more. I think it such a deuced trouble. Diamonds trumps, eh?" said Belle, laying the note down till he should have leisure to attend to it. Poor old fellow! I dare say he was afraid of another onslaught from maiden ladies.

"Come, Belle," said Glenville; "come Belle, open your letter; we're all impatience. If you won't go, I will in your place."

"Do, my dear fellow. Take care you're not pounced down upon by a respectable papa for intentions, or called to account by a fierce brother with a stubbly beard," said Belle, lazily taking up the letter. As he did so, the melancholy indolence on his face changed to eagerness.

"The deuce! the Vane crest!"

"A note of invitation, probably!" suggested Gower.

"Would they send an invitation to Patty Greene's? I tell you it's addressed to L. C.," said Belle, disdainfully, opening the letter, leaving its giant deer couchant intact. "I thought it very likely; I expected it, indeed—poor little dear! I oughtn't to have let it out. Ain't you jealous, old fellows? Little darling! Perhaps I may be tricked into matrimony after all. I'd rather a presentiment that advertisement would come to something. There, you may all look at it, if you like."

It was a dainty sheet of scented cream-laid, stamped with the deer couchant, such as had brought us many an invitation down from Fern Chase, and on it was written, in delicate caligraphy:

"G. V. understands the meaning of the advertisement, and will meet L. C. at the entrance of Fern Wood, at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

There was a dead silence as we read it; then a tremendous buzz. Cheaply as we held women, I don't think there was one of us who wasn't surprised at Geraldine's doing any clandestine thing like this. He sat with a look of indolent triumph, curling his perfumed moustaches, and looking at the little autograph, which gave us evidence of what he often boasted—Geraldine Vane's regard.

"Let me look at your note," said Fairlie, stretching out his hand.

He soon returned it, with a brief, "Very complimentary indeed!"

When the men left, I chanced to be last, having mislaid my cigar-case. As I looked about for it, Fairlie addressed me in the same brief, stern tone between his teeth with which he spoke to Belle.

"Hardinge, you made this absurd bet with Courtenay, did you not? Is this note a hoax upon him?"

"Not that I know of—it doesn't look like it. You see there is the Vane crest, and the girl's own initials."

"Very true." He turned round to the window again, and leaned against it, looking out into the dawn, with a look upon his face that I was very sorry to see.

"But it is not like Geraldine," I began. "It may be a trick. Somebody may have stolen their paper and crest—it's possible. I tell you what I'll do to find out; I'll follow Belle to-morrow, and see who does meet him in Fern Wood."

"Do," said Fairlie, eagerly. Then he checked himself, and went on tapping an impatient tattoo on the shutter. "You see, I have known the family for years—known her when she was a little child. I should be sorry to think that one of them could be capable of such——"

Despite his self-command he could not finish his sentence. Geraldine was a great deal too dear to him to be treated in seeming carelessness, or spoken lightly of, however unwisely she might act. I found my cigar case. His laconic "Good night!" told me he would rather be alone, so I closed the door and left him.

The morning was as sultry and as clear as a July day could be, when Belle lounged down the street, looking the perfection of a gentleman, a trifle less bored and *blasé* than ordinary, *en route* to his appointment at Fern Wood (a sequestered part of the Vane estate), where trees and lilies of the valley grew wild, and where the girls were accustomed to go for pic-nics or sketching. As soon as he had turned a corner, Gower and I turned it too, and with perseverance worthy a better cause Tom and I followed Belle in and out and down the road which led to Fern Wood—a flat, dusty, stony two miles—on which, in the blazing noon of a hot midsummer day, nothing short of Satanic coercion, or love of Geraldine Vane, would have induced our beauty to immolate himself, and expose his delicate complexion.

"I bet you anything, Tom," said I, confidently, "that this is a hoax, like yesterday's. Geraldine will no more meet Belle there than all the Ordnance Office."

"Well, we shall see," responded Gower. "Somebody might get the note-paper from the bookseller, and the crest seal through the servants, but they'll hardly get Geraldine there bodily against her will."

We waited at the entrance of the wood, shrouded ourselves in the wild hawthorn hedges, while we could still see Belle—of course we did not mean to be near enough to overhear him—who paced up and down the green alleys under the firs and larches, rendered doubly dark by the evergreens, brambles, and honeysuckles,

which, ripened by the sun,
Forbade the sun to enter.

He paced up and down there a good ten minutes, prying about with his eye-glass, but unable to see very far in the tangled boughs, and heavy dusky light of the untrimmed wood. Then there was the flutter of something azure among the branches, and Gower gave vent to a low whistle of surprise.

"By George, Hardinge! there's Geraldine. Well! I didn't think she'd have done it. You see they're all alike if they get the opportunity."

It *was* Geraldine herself—it was her fluttering muslin, her abundant folds, her waving ribbons, her tiny sailor hat, and her little veil, and under the veil her face, with its delicate tinting, its pencilled eyebrows, and its undulating bright-coloured hair. There was no doubt about it; it was Geraldine. I vow I was as sorry to have to tell it to Fairlie as if I'd had to tell him she was dead, for I knew how it would cut him to the heart to know not only that she had given herself to his rival, but that his little playmate, whom he had thought truth, and honesty, and daylight itself, should have stooped to a clandestine interview, arranged through an advertisement! Their retreating figures were soon lost in the dim woodland, and Tom and I turned to retrace our steps.

"No doubt about it now, old fellow?" quoth Gower.

"No, confound her!" swore I.

"Confound her? *Et pourquoi?* Hasn't she a right to do what she likes?"

"Of course she has, the cursed little flirt; but she'd no earthly business to go making such love to Fairlie. It's a rascally shame, and I don't care if I tell her so myself."

"She'll only say you're in love with her too," was Gower's sensible response. "I'm not surprised myself. I always said she was an out-and-out coquette."

I met Fairlie coming out of his room as I went up to mine. He looked as men will look when they have not been in bed all night, and have watched the sun up with painful thoughts for their companions.

"You have been——" he began; then stopped short, unwilling or unable to put the question into words.

"After Belle? Yes. It is no hoax, Geraldine met him herself."

I did not relish telling him, and therefore told it, in all probability, bluntly, and blunderingly—tact, like talk, having, they say, been given to women. A spasm passed over his face. "*Herself!*" he echoed. Until then I do not think he had realised it as even possible.

"Yes, there was no doubt about it. What a wretched little coquette she must have been; she always seemed to make such game of Belle——"

But Fairlie, saying something about his gloves that he had left behind, had gone back into his room again before I had half done my sentence. When Belle came back, about half an hour afterwards, with an affected air of triumph, and for once in his life of languid sensations really well contented, Gower and I poured questions upon him, as, done up with the toil of his dusty walk, and horrified to find himself so low bred as to be hot, he kicked off his varnished boots, imbibed Seltzer, and fanned himself with a periodical before he could find breath to answer us.

"Was it Geraldine?"

"Of course it was Geraldine," he said, yawning.

"And will she marry you, Belle?"

"To be sure she will. I should like to see the woman that wouldn't," responded Belle, shutting his eyes and nestling down among the cushions. "And what's more, I've been fool enough to let her make me ask her. Give me some more sherry, Phil; a man wants support under such circumstances. The deuce if I'm not as hot as a ploughboy! It was very cruel of her to call a fellow out with the sun at the meridian; she might as well have chosen twilight. But, I say, you fellows, keep the secret, will you? she don't want her family to get wind of it, because they're bothering her to marry that old cove, Mount Trefoil, with his sixty years and his broad acres, and wouldn't let her take anybody else if they knew it; she's under age, you see."

"But how did she know you were L. C.?"

"Fairlie told her, and the dear little vain thing immediately thought it was an indirect proposal to herself, and answered it; of course I didn't undeceive her. She *raffoles* of me—it'll be almost too much of a good thing, I'm afraid. She's deuced prudish, too, much more than I should have thought *she*'d have been; but I vow she'd only let me kiss her hand, and that was gloved."

"I hate prudes," said Gower; "they've always much more devilry than the open-hearted ones. Videlicet—here's your young lady stiff enough only to give you her hand to kiss, and yet she'll lower herself to a clandestine correspondence and stolen interviews—a condescension I don't think I should admire in *my* wife."

"Love, my dear fellow, oversteps all—what d'ye call 'em —boundaries," said Belle, languidly. "What a bore! I shall never be able to wear this coat again, it's so ingrained with dust; little puss, why didn't she wait till it was cooler?"

"Did you fix your marriage-day?" asked Tom rather contemptuously.

"Yes, I was very weak!" sighed Belle; "but you see she's uncommonly pretty, and there's Mount Trefoil and lots of men, and, I fancy, that dangerous fellow Fairlie, after her; so we hurried matters. We've been making love to one another all these three months, you know, and fixed it so soon as Thursday week. Of course she blushed, and sighed, and put her handkerchief to her eyes, and all the rest of it, *en règle;* but she consented, and I'm to be sacrificed. But not a word about it, my dear fellows! The Vanes are to be kept in profoundest darkness, and to lull suspicion, I'm to go there scarcely at all until then, and when I do, she'll let me know when she will be out, and I'm to call on her mother then. She'll write to me, and put the letters in a hollow tree in the wood, where I'm to leave my answers, or, rather, send 'em; catch me going over that road again! Don't give me joy, old boys. I know I'm making a holocaust of myself, but deuce take me if I can help it—she is so deuced pretty!"

Fairlie was not at mess that night. Nobody knew where he was. I learnt, long months afterwards, that as soon as I had told him of Geraldine's identity, he, still thirsting to disbelieve, reluctant to condemn, catching at straws to save his idol from being shattered as men in love will do, had thrown himself across his horse and torn off to Fern Dell to see whether or no Geraldine was at home.

His heart beat faster and thicker as he entered the drawing-room than it had done before the lines of Ferozeshah, or in the giant semicircle at Sobraon; it stood still as in the far end of the room, lying back on a low chair, sat Geraldine, her gloves and sailor hat lying on her lap. She sprang up to welcome him with her old gay smile.

"Good God! that a child like that can be such an accomplished actress!" thought Fairlie, as he just touched her hand.

"Have you been out to-day?" he asked suddenly.

"You see I have."

"Prevarication is conviction," thought Fairlie, with a deadly chill over him.

"Where did you go, love?" asked mamma.

"To see Adela Ferrers; she is not well, you know, and I came home through part of the wood to gather some of the anemones; I don't mean anemones, they are over—lilies of the valley."

She spoke hurriedly, glancing at Fairlie all the time, who never took his iron gaze off her, though all the beauty and glory was draining away from his life with every succeeding proof that stared him in the face with its cruel evidence.

At that minute Lady Vane was called from the room to give some directions to her head gardener about some flowers, over which she was particularly choice, and Fairlie and Geraldine were left in dead silence, with only the ticking of the timepiece and the chirrup of the birds outside the open windows to break its heavy monotony.

Fairlie bent over a spaniel, rolling the dog backwards and forwards on the rug.

Geraldine stood on the rug, her head on one side, in her old pretty attitude of plaintiveness and defiance, the bright sunshine falling round her and playing on her gay dress and fair hair—a tableau lost upon the Colonel, who, though he had risen too, was playing sedulously with the dog.

"Colonel Fairlie, what is the matter with you? How unkind you are to-day!"

Fairlie was roused at last, disgusted that so young a girl could be so accomplished a liar and actress, sick at heart that he had been so deceived, mad with jealousy, and that devil in him sent courtesy flying to the winds.

"Pardon me, Miss Vane, you waste your coquetries on me.

Unhappily I know their value, and am not likely to be duped by them."

Geraldine's face flushed as deep a rose hue as the geraniums nodding their heads in at the windows.

"Coquetries?—duped? What do you mean?"

"You know well enough what. All I warn you is, never try them again on me—never come near me any more with your innocent smiles and your lying lips, or, by Heaven, Geraldine Vane, I may say what I think of you in plainer words than suit the delicacy of a lady's ears!"

Geraldine's eyes flashed fire; from rose-hued as the geraniums she changed to the dead white of the Guelder roses beside them.

"Colonel Fairlie, you are mad, I think! If you only came here to insult me——"

"I had better leave? I agree with you. Good morning."

Wherewith Fairlie took his hat and whip, bowed himself out, and throwing himself across his horse, tore away many miles beyond Norwich, I should say, and rode into the stable-yard at twelve o'clock that night, his horse with every hair wringing and limb trembling at the headlong pace he had been ridden; such a midnight gallop as only Mazeppa, or a Border rider, or Turpin racing for his life, or a man vainly seeking to leave behind him some pursuing ghost of memory or passion, ever took before.

We saw little of him for the next few days. Luckily for him, he was employed to purchase several strings of Suffolk horses for the corps, and he rode about the country a good deal, and went over to Newmarket, and to the Bury horse fair, inspecting the cattle, glad, I dare say, of an excuse to get away.

"I feel nervous, terribly nervous; do give me the Seltzer and hock, Tom. They wonder at the fellows asking for beer before their execution. I don't; and if a fellow wants it to keep his spirits up before he's hanged, he may surely want it before he's married, for one's a swing and a crash, and it's all over and done most likely before you've time to know anything about it; but the other you walk into so deliberately, superintend the sacrifice of yourself, as it were, like that old cove Seneca; feel yourself rolling down-hill like Regulus, with all the horrid nails of the 'domesticities' pricking you in every corner; see all the sunshine of life, as poets have it, fading, sweetly but surely, from your grasp, and Death, *alias* the Matrimonial Black Cap, coming down ruthlessly on your devoted heads. I feel low—shockingly low. Pass me the Seltzer, Tom, do!"

So spake Geraldine's *sposo* that was to be, on the evening before his marriage-day, lying on his sofa in his Cashmere dressing-gown, his gold embroidered slippers, and his velvet smoking-cap, puffing largely at his meerschaum, and unbosoming his private sentiments and emotions to the (on this score) sufficiently sympathetic listeners, Gower and me.

"I don't pity you!" said Tom, contemptuously, who had as much disdain for a man who married as for one who bought gooseberry for champagne, or Cape for comet hock, and did not know the difference—"I don't pity you one bit. You've put the curb on yourself; you can't complain if you get driven where you don't like."

"But, my dear fellow, *can* one help it?" expostulated Belle, pathetically. "When a little winning, bewitching, attractive little animal like that takes you in hand, and traps you as you catch a pony, holding out a sieve of oats, and coaxing you, and so-ho-ing you till she's fairly got the bridle over your head, and the bit between your teeth, what is a man to do?"

"Remember that as soon as the bit *is* in your mouth, she'll never trouble herself to give you any oats, or so-ho you softly any more, but will take the whip hand of you, and not let you have the faintest phantom of a will of your own ever again," growled the misogamistic Tom.

"Catch a man's remembering while it's any use," was Belle's very true rejoinder. "After he's put his hand to a little bill, he'll remember it's a very green thing to do, but he don't often remember it before, I fancy. No, in things like this, one can't help oneself; one's time is come, and one goes down before fate. If anybody had told me that I should grow as spoony about any woman as I have about that little girl Geraldine, I'd have given 'em the lie direct; I would, indeed! But then she made such desperate love to me, took such a deuced fancy to me, you see; else, after all, the woman I might have chosen—— By George! I wonder what Lady Con, and the little Bosanquet, and poor Honoria, and all the rest of 'em will say?"

"What?" said Gower; "say 'Poor dear fellow' to you, and 'Poor girl, I pity her!' to your wife. So you're going to elope with Miss Geraldine? A man's generally too ready to marry his daughters, to force a fellow to carry them off by stealth. Besides, as Bulwer says somewhere, '*Gentlemen* don't run away with the daughters of gentlemen.'"

"Pooh, nonsense! all's fair in love or war," returned Belle, going into the hock and Seltzer to keep up his spirits. "You see, she's afraid, her governor's mind being so set on old Mount Trefoil and his baron's coronet; they might offer some opposition, put it off till she was one-and-twenty, you know—and she's so distractedly fond of me, poor little thing, that she'd die under the probation, probably—and I'm sure I couldn't keep faithful to her for two mortal years. Besides, there's something amusing in eloping; the excitement of it keeps up one's spirits; whereas, if I were marched to church with so many mourners—I mean groomsmen—I should feel I was rehearsing my own obsequies likeCharles V., and should funk it, ten to one I should. No! I like eloping: it gives the certain flavour of forbidden fruit, which many things, besides pure water, want to 'give them a relish.'"

"Let's see how's the thing to be managed?" asked Gower. "Beyond telling me I was to go with you, consigned ignominiously to the rumble, to witness the ceremony, I'm not very clear as to the programme."

"Why, as soon as it's dawn," responded Belle, with leisurely whiffs of his meerschaum, "I'm to take the carriage up to the gate at Fern Wood—this is what she tells me in her last note; she was coming to meet me, but just as she was dressed her mother took her to call on some people, and she had to resort to the old hollow tree. The deuce is in it, I think, to prevent our meeting; if it weren't for the letters and her maid we should have been horribly put to it for communication.—I'm to take the carriage, as I say, and drive up there, where she and her maid will be waiting. We drive away, of course, catch the 8·15 train, and cut off to town, and get married at the Regeneration, Piccadilly, where a fellow I know very well will act the priestly Calcraft. The thing that bothers me most of all is getting up so early. I used to hate it so awfully when I was a young one at the college. I like to have my bath, and my coffee, and my paper leisurely, and saunter through my dressing, and get up when the day's *warmed* for me. Early parade's one of the crying cruelties of the service; I always turn in again after it, and regard it as a hideous nightmare. I vow I couldn't give a greater test of my devotion than by getting up at six o'clock to go after her—deuced horrible exertion! I'm quite certain that my linen won't be aired, nor my coffee fit to drink, nor Perkins with his eyes half open, nor a quarter of his wits about him. Six o'clock! By George! nothing should get me up at that unearthly hour except my dear, divine, delicious little demon Geraldine! But she's so deuced fond of me, one must make sacrifices for such a little darling."

With which sublimely unselfish and heroic sentiment the bridegroom-elect drank the last of his hock and Seltzer, took his pipe out of his lips, flung his smoking cap lazily on to his Skye's head, who did not relish the attention, and rose languidly to get into his undress in time for mess.

As Belle had to get up so frightfully early in the morning, he did not think it worth while to go to bed at all, but asked us all to vingt-et-un in his room, where, with the rattle of half-sovereigns and the flow of rum-punch, he kept up his courage before the impending doom of matrimony. Belle was really in love with Geraldine, but in love in his own particular way, and consoled himself for his destiny and her absence by what I dare say seems to mademoiselle, fresh from her perusal of "Aurora Leigh" or "Lucille," very material comforters indeed. But, if truth were told, I am afraid mademoiselle would find, save that from one or two fellows here and there who go in for love as they go in for pig-sticking or tiger-hunting, with all their might and main, wagering even their lives in the sport, the Auroras and Lucilles are very apt to have their charms supplanted by the points of a favourite, their absence made endurable by the aroma of Turkish tobacco, and their last fond admonishing words, spoken with such persuasive caresses under the moonlight and the limes, against those "horrid cards, love," forgotten that very night under the glare of gas, while the hands that lately held their own so tenderly, clasped well-nigh with as much affection the unprecedented luck "two honours and five trumps?"

Man's love is of man's life a thing apart.

Byron was right; and if we go no deeper, how can it well be otherwise, when we have our stud, our pipe, our Pytchley, our Newmarket, our club, our coulisses, our Mabille, and our Epsom, and they—oh, Heaven help them—have no distraction, but a needle or a novel! The Fates forbid that our *agremens* should be *less*, but I dare say, if they had a vote in it, they'd try to get a trifle *more*. So Belle put his "love apart," to keep (or to rust, whichever you please) till six A.M. that morning, when, having by dint of extreme physical exertion got himself dressed, saw his valet pack his things with the keenest anxiety relative to the immaculate folding of his coats and the safe repose of his shirts, and at last was ready to go and fetch the bride his line in the *Daily* had procured him.

As Belle went down the stairs with Gower, who should come too, with his gun in his hand, his cap over his eyes, and a pointer following close at his heels, but Fairlie, going out to shoot over a friend's manor.

Of course he knew that Belle had asked for and obtained leave for a couple of months, but he had never heard for what purpose: and possibly, as he saw him at such an unusual hour, going out, not in his usual travelling guise of a wide-awake and a Maude, but with a delicate lavender tie and a toilet of the most unexceptionable art, the purport of his journey flashed fully on his mind, for his face grew as fixed and unreadable as if he had had on the iron mask. Belle, guessing as he did that Fairlie would not have disliked to have been in his place that morning, was both too kind-hearted and infinitely too much of a gentleman to hint at his own triumph. He laughed, and nodded a good morning.

"Off early, you see, Fairlie; going to make the most of my leave. 'Tisn't very often we can get one: our corps is deuced stiff and strict compared to the Guards and the Cavalry."

"At least our strictness keeps us from such disgraceful scenes as some of the other regiments have shown up of late," answered Fairlie between his teeth.

"Ah! well, perhaps so; still, strictness ain't pleasant, you know, when one's the victim."

"Certainly not."

"And, therefore, we should never be hard upon others."

"I perfectly agree with you."

"There's a good fellow. Well, I must be off; I've no time for philosophising. Good-bye, Colonel."

"Good-bye—a safe journey."

But I noticed that he held the dog's collar in one hand and the gun in the other, so as to have an excuse for not offering that *poignée de main* which ought to be as sure a type of friendship, and as safe a guarantee for good faith, as the Bedouin Arab's salt.

Belle nodded him a farewell, and lounged down the steps and into the carriage just as Fairlie's man brought his mare round.

Fairlie turned on to me with unusual fierceness, for generally he was very calm, and gentle, and impassive in manner.

"Where is he gone?"

I could not help but tell him, reluctant though I was, for I guessed pretty well what it would cost him to hear it. He did not say one word while I told him, but bent over Marquis, drawing the dog's leash tighter, so that I might not see his face, and without a sign or a reply he was out of the barracks, across his mare's back, and rushing away at a mad gallop, as if he would leave thought, and memory, and the curse of love for a worthless woman behind him for ever.

His man stood looking at the gun Fairlie had thrown to him with a puzzled expression.

"Is the Colonel gone mad?" I heard him say to himself. "The devil's in it, I think. He used to treat his things a little carefuller than this. As I live, he's been and gone and broke the trigger!"

The devil wasn't in it, but a woman *was*, an individual that causes as much mischief as any Asmodeus, Belphégor, or Mephistopheles. Some fair unknown correspondents assured me the other day, in a letter, that my satire on women was "a monstrous libel." All I can say is, that if it *be* a libel, it is like many a one for which one pays the highest, and which sounds the blackest—a libel that is *true!*

While his rival rode away as recklessly as though he was riding for his life, the gallant bridegroom—as the *Court-Circular* would have it—rolled on his way to Fern Wood, while Gower, very amiably occupying the rumble, smoked, and bore his position philosophically, comforted by the recollection that Geraldine's French maid was an uncommonly good-looking, coquettish little person.

They rolled on, and speedily the postilion pulled up, according to order, before the white five-bar gate, its paint blistering in the hot summer dawn, and the great fern-leaves and long grass clinging up round its posts, still damp with the six o'clock dew. Five minutes passed—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour. Poor Belle got impatient. Twenty minutes—five-and-twenty—thirty. Belle couldn't stand it. He began to pace up and down the turf, soiling his boots frightfully with the long wet grass, and rejecting all Tom's offers of consolation and a cigar-case.

"Confound it!" cried poor Belle, piteously, "I thought women were always ready to marry. I know, when I went to turn off Lacquers of the Rifles at St. George's, his bride had been waiting for him half an hour, and was in an awful state of mind, and all the other brides as well, for you know they always marry first the girl that gets there first, and all the other poor wretches were kept on tenterhooks too. Lacquers had lost the ring, and found it in his waistcoat after all! I say, Tom, devil take it, where *can* she be? It's forty minutes, as I live. We shall lose the train, you know. She's never prevented coming, surely. I think she'd let me hear, don't you? She could send Justine to me if she couldn't come by any wretched chance. Good Heavens, Tom, what shall I do?"

"Wait and don't worry," was Tom's laconic and common-sense advice; about the most irritating probably to a lover's feelings that could pretty well be imagined. Belle swore at him in stronger terms than he generally exerted himself to use. but was pulled up in the middle of them by the sight of Geraldine and Justine, followed by a boy bearing his bride's dainty trunks.

On came Geraldine in a travelling-dress: Justine following after her, with a brilliant smile, that showed all her white teeth, at "Monsieur Torm," for whom she had a very tender friendship, consolidated by certain half-sovereigns and French phrases whispered by Gower after his dinners at Fern Chase.

Belle met Geraldine with all that tender *empressement* which he knew well how to put into his slightest actions; but the young lady seemed already almost to have begun repenting her hasty step. She hung her head down, she held a handkerchief to her bright eyes, and to Belle's tenderest and most ecstatic whispers she only answered by a convulsive pressure of the arm, into which he had drawn her left hand, and a half-smothered sob from her heart's depths.

Belle thought it all natural enough under the circumstances. He knew women always made a point of impressing upon you that they are making a frightful sacrifice for your good when they condescend to accept you, and he whispered what tender consolation occurred to him as best fitted for the occasion, thanked her, of course, for all the rapture, &c., &c., assured her of his life-long devotion—you know the style—and lifted her into the carriage, Geraldine only responding with broken sighs and stifled sobs.

The boxes were soon beside Belle's valises, Justine soon beside Gower, the postilion cracked his whip over his out-sider, Perkins refolded his arms, and the carriage rolled down the lane.

Gower was very well contented with his seat in the rumble. Justine was a very dainty little Frenchwoman, with the smoothest hair and the whitest teeth in the world, and she and "Monsieur Torm" were eminently good friends, as I have told you, though to-day she was very coquettish and wilful, and laughed *à propos de bottes* at Gower, say what Chaumière compliments he might.

"Ma chère et charmante petite," expostulated Tom, "tes moues mutines sont ravissantes, mais je t'avoue que je préfère tes——"

"Tais-toi, bécasse!" cried Justine, giving him a blow with her parasol, and going off into what she would have called *éclats de rire.*

"Mais écoute-moi, Justine," whispered Tom, piqued by her perversity; "je raffole de toi! je t'adore, sur ma parole! je——Hallo! what the devil's the matter? Good gracious! Deuce take it!"

Well might Tom call on his Satanic Majesty to explain what met his eyes as he gave vent to all three ejaculations and maledictions. No less a sight than the carriage door flying violently open, Belle descending with a violent impetus, his face crimson, and his hat in his hand, clearing the hedge at a bound, plunging up to his ankles in mud on the other side of it, and starting across country at the top of his speed, rushing frantically straight over the heavy grass-land as if he had just escaped from Hanwell, and the whole hue and cry of keepers and policemen was let loose at his heels.

"Good Heavens! By Jove! Belle, Belle, I say, stop! Are you mad? What's happened? What's the row? I say—the devil!"

But to his incoherent but very natural exclamations poor Tom received no answer. Justine was screaming with laughter, the postilion was staring, Perkins swearing, Belle, flying across the country at express speed, rapidly diminishing into a small black dot in the green landscape, while from inside the carriage, from Geraldine, from the deserted bride, peals of laughter, long, loud, and uproarious, rang out in the summer stillness of the early morning.

"By Jupiter! but this is most extraordinary. The deuce is in it. Are they both gone stark staring mad?" asked Tom of his Cuba, or the blackbirds, or the hedge-cutter afar of, or anything or anybody that might turn out so amiable as to solve his problem for him.

No reply being given him, however, Tom could stand it no longer. Down he sprang, jerked the door open again, and put his head into the carriage.

"Hallo, old boy, done green, eh? Pity 'tisn't the 1st of April!" cried Geraldine, with renewed screams of mirth from the interior.

"Eh? What? What did you say, Miss Vane?" ejaculated Gower, fairly staggered by this extraordinary answer of a young girl, a lady, and a forsaken bride.

"What did I say, my dear fellow? Why, that you're done most preciously, and that I fancy it'll be a deuced long time before your delectable friend tries his hand at matrimony again, that's all. Done! oh, by George, he *is* done, and no mistake. Look at me, sir, ain't I a charming bride?"

With which eloquent language, Geraldine took off her hat, pulled down some false braids, pushed her hair off her forehead, shook her head like a water-dog after a bath, and grinned in Gower's astonished eyes—*not* Geraldine, but her twin-brother, Pretty Face!

"Do you know me now, old boy?" asked the Etonian, with demoniacal delight—"do you know me now? Haven't I chiselled him—haven't I tricked him—haven't I done him as green as young gooseberries, and as brown as that bag? Do you fancy he'll boast of his conquests again, or advertise for another wife? So you didn't know how I got Cary Clements, of the Ten Bells, to write the letters for me? and Justine to dress me in Geraldine's things? You know they always did say they couldn't tell her from me; I've proved it now, eh?—rather! Oh, by George, I never had a better luck! and not a creature guesses it, not a soul, save Justine, Nell, and me! By Jupiter, Gower, if you'd heard that unlucky Belle go on swearing devotion interminable, and enough love to stock all Mudie's novels? But I never dare let him kiss me, though my beard *is* down, confound it! Oh! what jolly fun it's been, Gower, no words can tell. I always said he shouldn't marry her; he'll hardly try to do it now, I fancy! What a lark it's been! I couldn't have done it, you know, without that spicy little French girl—she did my hair, and got up my crinoline, and stole Geraldine's dress, and tricked me up altogether, and carried my notes to the hollow oak, and took all my messages to Belle. Oh, Jupiter! what fun it's been. If Belle isn't gone clean out of his senses, it's very odd to me. When he was going to kiss me, and whispered, 'My dearest, my darling, my wife!' I just took off my hat and grinned in his face, and said, 'Ain't this a glorious go?' Oh! by George, Gower, I think the fun will kill me!"

And the wicked little dog of an Etonian sank back among the carriage cushions stifled with his laughter. Gower staggered backwards against a roadside tree, and stood there with his lips parted and his eyes wide open, bewildered, more than that cool hand had ever been in all his days, by the extraordinary finish of poor Belle's luckless wooing; the postilion rolled off his saddle in cachinnatory fits at the little monkey's narrative; Perkins, like a soldier as he was, utterly impassive to all surrounding circumstances, shouldered a valise and dashed at quick march after his luckless master; Justine clapped her plump French gloved fingers with a million ma Fois! and mon Dieus! and O Ciels! and far away in the grey distance sped the retreating figure of poor Belle, with the license in one pocket and the wedding-ring in the other, flying as if his life depended on it, from the shame, and the misery, and the horror of that awful sell, drawn on his luckless head by that ill-fated line in the *Daily*.

While Belle drove to his hapless wooing, Fairlie galloped on and on. Where he went he neither knew nor cared. He had ridden heedlessly along, and the grey, left to her own devices, had taken the road to which her head for the last four months had been so often turned—the road leading to Fern Chase, and about a mile from the Vane estate lost her left hind shoe, and came to a dead stop of her own accord, after having been ridden for a couple of hours as hard as if she had been at the Grand Military. Fairlie threw himself off the saddle, and, leaving the bridle loose on the mare's neck, who he knew would not stray a foot away from him, he flung himself on the grass, under the cool morning shadows of the roadside trees, no sound in the quiet country round him breaking in on his weary thoughts, till the musical ring of a pony's hoofs came pattering down the lane. He never heard it, however, nor looked up, till the quick trot slackened and then stopped beside him.

"Colonel Fairlie!"

"Good Heavens! Geraldine!"

"Well," she said, with tears in her eyes and petulant anger in her voice, "so you have never had the grace to come and apologise for insulting me as you did last week?"

"For mercy's sake do not trifle with me."

"Trifle! No, indeed," interrupted the young lady. "Your behaviour was no trifle, and it will be a very long time before I forgive it, if ever I do."

"Stay—wait a moment."

"How can you ask me, when, five days ago, you bid me never come near you with my cursed coquetries again?" asked Geraldine, trying, and vainly, to get the bridle out of his grasp.

"God forgive me! I did not know what I said. What I had heard was enough to madden a colder man than I. Is it untrue?"

"Is what untrue?"

"You know well enough. Answer me, is it true or not?"

"How can I tell what you mean? You talk in enigmas. Let me go."

"I will never let you go till you have answered me."

"How can I answer you if I don't know what you mean?" retorted Geraldine, half laughing.

"Do not jest. Tell me, yes or no, are you going to marry that cursed fool?"

"What 'cursed fool?' Your language is not elegant, Colonel Fairlie!" said Geraldine, with demure mischief.

"Belle! Would you have met him? Did you intend to elope with him?"

Geraldine's eyes, always large enough, grew larger, and a darker blue still, in extremest astonishment.

"Belle!—elope with him? What, are you dreaming? Are you mad?"

"Almost," said Fairlie, recklessly. "Have you misled him, then—tricked him? Do you care nothing for him? Answer me, for Heaven's sake, Geraldine!"

"I know nothing of what you are talking!" said Geraldine, with her surprised eyes wide open still. "Oblige me by leaving my pony's head. I shall be too late home."

"You never answered his advertisement, then?"

"The very question insults me! Let my pony go."

"You never met him in Fern Wood—never engaged yourself to him—never corresponded with him?"

"Colonel Fairlie, you have no earthly right to put such questions to me," interrupted Geraldine, with her hot geranium colour in her cheeks and her eyes flashing fire. "I honour the report, whoever circulated it, far more than it deserves, by condescending to contradict it. Have the kindness to unhand my pony, and allow me to continue my ride."

"You shall *not* go," said Fairlie as passionately as she, "till you have answered me one more question: Can you, will you ever forgive me?"

"No," said Geraldine, with an impatient shake of her head, but a smile nevertheless under the shadow of her hat.

"Not if you know it was jealousy of him which maddened me, love for you which made me speak such unpardonable words to you?—not if I tell you how perfect was the tale I was told, so that there was no link wanting, no room for doubt or hope?—not if I tell you what tortures I had endured in losing you—what bitter punishment I have already borne in crediting the report that you were secretly engaged to my rival—would you not forgive me then?"

"No," whispered the young lady perversely, but smiling still, the geraniums brighter in her cheeks, and her eyes fixed on the bridle.

Fairlie dropped the reins, let go her hand, and left her free to ride, if she would, away from him.

"Will you leave me, Geraldine? Not for this morning only, remember, nor for to-day, nor for this year, but—for ever?"

"No!" It was a very different "No" this time.

"Will you forgive me, then, my darling?"

Her fingers clasped his hand closely, and Geraldine looked at him under her hat; her eyes so like an April day, with their tears, and their tender and mischievous smile, were so irresistibly provocative that Fairlie took his pardon for granted, and thanked her in the way that seemed to him at once most eloquent and most satisfactory.

If you wish to know what became of Belle, he fled across the country to the railway station, and spent his leave Heaven knows where—in sackcloth and ashes, I suppose—meditating on his frightful sell. *We* saw nothing more of him; he could hardly show in Norwich again with all his laurels tumbled in the dust, and his trophies of conquest laughing-stocks for all the troop. He exchanged into the Z battery going out to India, and I never saw or heard of him till a year or two ago, when he landed at Portsmouth, a much wiser and pleasanter man. The lesson, joined to the late campaign under Sir Colin, had done him a vast amount of good; he had lost his conceit, his vanity, his affectation, and was what Nature meant him to be—a sensible, good hearted fellow. As luck would have it, Pretty Face, who had joined the Eleventh, was there too, and Fairlie and his wife as well, and Belle had the good sense to laugh it over with them, assuring Geraldine, however, that no one had eclipsed the G. V. whom he had once hoped had answered his memorable advertisement. He has grown wiser, and makes a jest of it now; it may be a sore point still, I cannot say—nobody sees it; but, whether or no, in the old city of Norwich, and in our corps, from Cadets to Colonels, nobody forgets THE LINE IN THE "DAILY;" WHO DID IT, AND WHO WAS DONE BY IT.

FITZ'S ELECTION;

OR

BLUE AND YELLOW.

THERE was to be an Election. The Lords and Commons hadn't hit it; one hon. gentleman had blackguarded another hon. gentleman; the big schoolboys of St. Stephen's had thrown stones at each other, and as they all lived in glass houses, the practice was dangerous; the session had not benefitted the country—so far as the country could see—one bit; the *Times* opined that the nation was going to the dogs, and suggested that parliament should dissolve. The *Times* is Cæsar now-a-days, so parliament obeyed, broke itself up, and appealed to the country—*i.e.* set the Carlton and Reform counting up their money, the lawyers quarrelling for all the dirty work, and the 10*l.* voters looking out for XXX and fivers; and the country responded promptly, loving a tussle as dearly as a beagle, by sharpening its bowie-knives for the contest, wondering who would buy its votes the highest, and hunting up its stock of Blue and Yellow banners.

"So the governor wants me to stand for Cantitborough. I'm not sure I won't. I'm confoundedly tired of this life year after year. Perhaps the election will give me a little fun. What do you say?" began my cousin Fitz one morning, lying reading the *Field* and drinking strong coffee with brandy in it by way of breakfast, when I called on him in his chambers in the Albany. "I want something to do. The town's so confoundedly Tory, there'll be no end of opposition. We shall set them altogether by the ears, the Blues and Yellows won't speak for years, and I shall be written up in the *Cantitborough*

Post as a Leveller, a Socialist, a Sceptic, a Democrat, and all the delicious names that the slow coaches call anybody who's a little wide awake and original. Yes, I think I'll put up for it."

"Who contests it with you?"

"There are three of 'em," answered Fitz; "one an old Indian, Tory out-and-out, worth a million, and consequently worshipped by his neighbours, at whom, I believe, when heated with overmuch curry and cognac, he swears more than is customary in these polite times. The next is a boy, just one-and-twenty—you know him, Cockadoodle's son. He was in petticoats the other day, but, as his father's an Earl, he's to be transplanted from the nursery to the Commons without any intermediate education. The other is that sneaking thing, that compromise between right and wrong, that hybrid animal, a Liberal Conservative. You know him too, Le Hoop Smith; that creature who made his tin by wool, or something horrid, and bought Foxley, and set up as the patriarchal father of his people, in the new-fangled country squire style, with improved drainage, model cottages, prize labourers, and all the rest of it. Two of us must go to the wall. I shall like the fight, and you'll do the chief of the canvassing, mind. All I engage to do is to kiss any pretty women there may be in the place."

"You're very kind, taking the fun and giving me the work. I suppose you know you'll have to shake hands with every one of the Great Unwashed?"

"Brutes!" rejoined Fitz, who was popularly supposed to be a Socialist and Democrat; "I'll see them all hanged first!"

"And you must joke with the butchers, and have a glass with the coalheavers, and make friends with the sweeps."

"I'd sooner lose my election," rejoined the Republican.

"And you must kiss a baby or two."

The horror, loathing, and disgust expressed on Fitz's face were as good to see as "Box and Cox."

"Not to get the premiership! Faugh! I'd lose my seat fifty times over. Of all the loathsome ideas! If you've nothing pleasanter to suggest, you'd better get out of the room, if you please."

"Thank you. Don't you remember the sensation Mr. Samuel Slumkey produced by like caresses in Pickwick?"

"Pickwick go to the devil, and you too! I shall do nothing more than give them my tin, as everything is bought and sold now-a-days, and tell them I shall vote for free trade, cheap divorces, marriage with whoever one likes, religious toleration —in fact, for liberty, for everything and everybody. Then, if they don't like my opinions, they can have the Liberal Conservative instead. *I* shan't care two straws."

"Admirably philosophic! It's lucky you're not going to try the county. The farmers and clericals wouldn't have you at any price. You cut at the root of their monopoly—corn-laws and tithes, church-rates and protection. However, the more fight the more fun. We shall be like a couple of terriers in a barn full of rats. When shall we go down?"

"Tuesday. I shall go to Hollywood, it's a snug little box, and so much closer the town than the governor's; and as he's so ill, he won't want the bother of us. I mean to have little Beauclerc as my agent; he was with me at Eton, and is the sharpest dog in Lincoln's Inn. That's enough business for to-day. I'm now going to Tattersall's to look at a roan filly to run tandem with Rumpunch; then I'm to meet my Lady Frisette in the Square Gardens at two; and at seven dine at the Castle with Grouse and some other men. So ring the bell for Soames, and order the cab round, there's a good boy."

My cousin (Randolph Fitzhardinge, according to the register and his visiting cards, but to us and to everybody briefly Fitz) is a fine, tall, handsome fellow, a trifle bronzed, and more than a trifle blasé, aquiline features, a devil-may-care expression, and a figure not beat in the Guards. He has been amusing himself about in the world ever since he left Christ Church, ten years ago, and as he will come into 12,000*l.* a year whenever his father leaves him to reign in his stead, has not thought himself necessitated to do more than live in the Albany, hunt with the Pytchley, lounge in the "bay-window," habituate the coulisses, and employ all the other ingenious methods for killing time invented by men about town. He is a good old fellow; the best oar in the Blue Jersey B.C., the firmest seat and the lightest hand in the county, as good a batsman as any in the Zingari Eleven (and these cover a multitude of sins), the cleverest sailor in the whole R.V.Y. Squadron, quite able to be his own captain were he not too lazy to so far exert himself, and, moreover, is as clear-headed, generous-hearted, and high-spirited a man as any on earth.

Tuesday came, and Fitz (leaving Lady Frisette dissolved in tears in her boudoir, which tears, no doubt, were dried as soon as his back was turned, as being no longer necessary, and destructive to rouge and beauty), with Beauclerc and myself—and Rumpunch and the new filly in a horse-box—put himself in the express for Pottleshire.

We had a carriage to ourselves, and of course, as soon as we were out of Paddington, took out our pipes and began to enjoy a quiet smoke.

"I do wish," began Fitz, opening the window and taking off his cap, for it was a hot June afternoon, "they'd keep a carriage, as they do in Venice, for the muffs that can't stand the sweet odours of regalia, and not sacrifice us by boxing us up without a weed for four, six, perhaps twelve hours, or else making us pay *5l.* for other people's olfactory fancies. I wonder somebody don't take it up. They write a lot of nonsense about this nuisance and that evil, that they're great idiots to notice at all; but if they would write up the crying injustice to smokers on British railways, there'd be something like a case—the Woolwich flogging's nothing to it."*

"Wait till we've got the election, and then send a letter to the *Times* about it, signed 'M.P.,' or a 'Lover of Justice,'" said Beauclerc, the barrister, a cute little fellow, fast as a telegraph, and sharp as a ferret's bite.

"I'll get up a petition rather, signed by all smokers, and addressed to all the directors. I think we're pretty safe for to-day. I don't fancy the express stops at more than a couple of stations between this and Cantitborough so we are not likely to have any women to bore us. I detest travelling with women," said Fitz, looking out of the window as if he dreaded an advent of feminines along the telegraph wires. "You have to put out your pipe, offer them your *Punch*, and squeeze into nothing to make room for their skirts. Let's look at the Bradshaw. No! we only stop twice: thought so. It will certainly be odd if we can't keep the carriage to ourselves."

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* This has been done since Fitz suggested it. But the smokers' grievance is little abated. Perhaps ladies fear smoking-carriages like smoking-rooms will be too often preferred to their fair selves, and they will have to travel from Dan to Beersheba in miserable solitude!

With which unchivalrous sentiment Fitz poked up his pipe, cut the paper with his ticket, and settled himself comfortably. Twenty minutes after, the engine gave a shriek, which woke him out of his serenity.

"Here's Bottleston, confound it!" cried Fitz. "I know the place—there's never anybody but a farmer or two for the second class. No fear of crinoline out of these wilds."

Fitz made rather too sure. As we hissed, and whistled, and panted, and puffed into the station, what should we see on the platform but six women—absolutely six—talking and laughing together, with a maid and a lot of luggage cased up, after the custom of females, in brown holland, as if the boxes had put on smock-frocks by mistake. Fitz swore mildly, puffed an enormous cloud to frighten them, and leaned forward to show as if the carriage was full. Not a bit of use was it—with the instinctive obstinacy of her sex, up to our very door came one of the fatal half dozen.

"There's room in here, Timbs," she said, with the supremest tranquillity, motioning to her maid to put in the hundred things—bouquet, dressing-case, book, travelling-bag, and Heaven knows what, with which young ladies will cumber themselves on a journey of half an hour.

"The perfume is extremely like that of a tobacco-shop, where there is license to smoke on the premises," whispered the intruder to one of her companions, with a significant glance at us.

The whistle screamed—the young ladies bid each other good-bye with frantic haste and great enthusiasm—the train started, throwing the maid into Beau's arms, who (as she was thirty and red-haired) was not grateful for the accident, and her mistress seated herself opposite Fitz and began to pay great attention to a poodle imprisoned in a basket, and very prone to rebel against his incarceration.

"That little brute will yap all the way, I suppose?" muttered Fitz, looking supremely haughty and stiltified.

The dog's owner glanced up quickly. "Dauphin never annoys any one."

Fitz, cool as he was, looked caught, bent his head, and putting his pipe in his pocket with a sigh, stuck his glass in his eye and calmly criticised the young lady. She was decidedly good style, with large bright hazel eyes and hair to match, beautifully dressed, too, in black laces and dark azure silks. She was pretty enough to console Beau for the loss of his smoke, and even Fitz thawed a little, and actually went the length of offering her (with his grandest air, though) the *Saturday* he was reading. After a time he dropped a monosyllable or two about the weather; she was ready enough to talk—I hate that "silent system" of John Bull and his daughters—and in half an hour Fitz had examined and admired the poodle, and was forgetting his lost pipe in chatting with the poodle's mistress, when he somehow or other got upon the general election.

"We are all excitement," laughed the young lady. "It is quite delightful to have anything to stir up this unhappy county. I have only lived in it six months, but I am sure it is the dullest place in the world—the North Pole couldn't be worse."

"Is it indeed?" said Fitz. "Pray can you tell me who are the candidates?"

"General Salter, Mr. Fitzhardinge, Lord Verdant, and a Mr. Smith—Le Hoop Smith, I mean; I beg his pardon!"

"May I ask whom you favour with your good wishes?"

"They are none of them worth much, I fancy," she answered. "Mr. Fitzhardinge, I understand, is the only clever one; but everybody says he is good for nothing."

"Not exactly the man to be a member, then," observed Fitz, gravely, stroking the poodle. "What is said against him?"

"I don't know. They call him extravagant, sceptic, socialist, republican—in fact, there is no name they don't give him. I think he would do the Shire good for that very reason; it wants something original."

"Then you are a Radical," smiled Fitz.

She smiled too.

"It is treason for me to say so; we are all Blue *à outrance.* Ah! here is Cantitborough."

It *was* Cantitborough; that neat, clean, quiet, antiquated town, that always puts me in mind of an old maid dressed for a party; that slowest and dreariest of boroughs, where the streets are as full of grass as an acre of pasture-land, and the inhabitants are driven to ring their own door-bells lest they should rust from disuse.

The train stopped, and Fitz looked as disgusted at losing his travelling companion as he had done at her first appearance, and stared with "Who the devil are you?" plainly written on his face, at a young fellow who met her on the platform. Fitz was before him, though, in handing her and the poodle out, and went to look after her luggage, for motives of his own, as you may guess. He was very graciously thanked for his trouble, had a pretty bow to repay him, and saw the poodle and its mistress off with her unknown cavalier (a brother, probably, from the don't carish way that he met her) before he got on a dog-cart and tooled us down the road to Hollywood, a snug little box two miles from Cantitborough, left him by Providence, impersonated by a godfather, with eight or nine hundred a year.

"Of course you improved the occasion, Fitz, and saw the name on the boxes?" said Beau, as we drove along.

"Of course. It's Barnardiston. I never heard of it in the county, did you, Fan? She ought to be a lady, by her style and her voice; what a touchstone of birth voice is! I wonder who that young fool was who met her?"

"Why of necessity a fool because he chanced to be in your way?" laughed Beau. "He was a Cantab, I guess, by his cut; Cambridge is always stamped on those little straw hats and fast coats, as Balmoral boots indicate a strong-minded young woman, earrings out of their bonnets, girls that want one to look at 'em, Quaker colours and sunshades, girls who can't go in for the attractive line, so have sought refuge in the district visiting. Bless your heart, I always know a woman by her dress."

"What do you say to Dauphin's owner, then?"

"Possibly coquettish; fast enough to be pleasant; not fast enough to be bold; good taste, but not a notion of economy; knows she's pretty feet, and is too wise to disfigure them," promptly responded little Beau.

"Bravo!" said Fitz, "that's just my style. We'll fish the girl up, and show her that if I'm 'good for nothing' in all the other capacities of life, I'm first-rate at a flirtation; can't live without one, indeed, and I don't see why one should try, since, as the women are never easy but when we're making love to them, it would be a want of charity not to oblige them Here we are. By Jove! I hope they'll have iced the wine properly."

"Soames," said Fitz to his man, when he had discussed the champagne, which *was* iced as cold as a "wallflower's" answer when you ask if she had enjoyed her ball—"Soames, go over this evening to Cantitborough, and find out for me if there are any people called Barnardiston living anywhere there, and bring me word all about them."

"Certainly, sir."

And that night, when we were smoking out on the lawn, Soames, who had often sped on like errands, made his report. There was a Barnardiston *père*, a gentleman of independent fortune, living at the Larches; a Barnardiston *mère*, over whom he tyrannised greatly; a son, who was at John's; two small boys, and two daughters, one, Glencora, who was engaged to the perpetual curate of St. Hildebrande's, and one, Caroline, who, as far as Soames could hear, was not engaged to anybody at all.

"Now, by George!" said Fitz, puffing his regalia in the moon's face, "Dauphin's mistress is a vast lot too good for that pursy little Low Church fellow at St. Hildebrande's. I wonder if it *is* she? Glencora sounds more like her than Caroline."

"Calm your mind, old fellow," said Beau; "our beauty isn't engaged to a parson, take my word for it. I always know the betrothed of the Church at a glance. They're getting in training to take interest in the distribution of flannel petticoats and brown-papered tracts; they cast their eyes away from good-looking fellows, for fear they should be tempted to compare blue ties with white chokers; they wear already the Lady Bountiful head of the parish air; they try to inflate themselves with big talk on the duties of a clergyman's wife, but in their secret souls are already weighed down by the dreadful decree that 'deacons' wives must be grave, not slanderous; sober, faithful in all things;' as if women would not just as soon be put in Newgate for life as denied their natural food—scandal and flirtation. No! take comfort, Fitz, your love of the railway carriage is no parson's fiancée, I'll swear."

Upon my honour I never knew a funnier contrast in my life than the candidates for the borough; and when I saw them all four on the Market Hill, I never laughed more at old Buckstone. There was first, of course, little Verdant, long, lanky, and meek-looking, like all the Cockadoodles, sitting forward on his horse's neck, as if he were afraid of tumbling off. There was his brother Conservative, Le Hoop Smith, bland, sweet smiling, and for all the world like a tabby cat on its best behaviour, in a gorgeous turn-out, with his arms, fished up by the Heralds'-office, blazoned on the panels as big as a sign-post. Then, on a fat, white shooting pony was Salter, the old fellow of the H.E.I.C.S., as round as a pumpkin and as yellow as a buttercup, who'd have thought nothing of lashing the independent electors as he'd flogged his Sepoys, and who, not being able to do that, swore at them vigorously; and then, last of all, was Fitz, haughty, dashing, "*distingué*" (as the shop people say of a 2*s.* 6*d.* cotton print), and sitting down on his thorough-bred as if they were both cast together in bronze. There was no doubt of Verdant's coming in; the fact of his being the son of the only live Earl near Cantitborough secured *that.* The tradesmen were for Salter, because he eat much and paid well. The clergy and professions were for Le Hoop Smith, because he was such a pious, poetical, spotless creature; and for Fitz——Well, poor Fitz had the women, and one or two enlightened individuals, on his side. A very small hap'orth of bread to a whole ocean of sack were all the constituents he seemed likely to gain, though Beau and other agents set to work as hard as steam-engines, and I canvassed perseveringly: the Socialist had a profound contempt in practice for the Canaille, whom in theory he dignified into the People; and despite his opinion that all men were equal, was not at all prepared to suffer familiarity from his unwashed brethren. If you have ever had the ill luck, as I have had, to be in a small spiteful country town in election time, when everybody is spitting and swearing like cats on the tiles, you can fancy what Cantitborough was at this period of its history. We stirred its utmost depths. The best hotel was a Blue committee-room; its second best was a Yellow committee-room. Big wigs talked loud of their principles; *gamins* flaunted rag flags in the gutters; mysterious strangers haunted its tap-rooms. Mr. Brown cut Mr. Green because he was Yellow. Mrs. A. dropped her bosom friend, Mrs. B., because she was Blue. The Town Council was divided against itself, and, consequently, couldn't stand straight on its legs (a charge, by the way, often brought against its members individually). Mary, the kitchen-maid, would no longer "walk along" with James the milkman, because he was all for that "hugly Smith." Cobblin, the shoemaker, was surprised by seeing two fivers lying snug in the heel of a Wellington; and Chalice, the rector, was startled by a gentle hint that the Deanery of Turtlefat might be vacant.

"Who do you think I'm going to solicit the vote from this morning?" said Fitz at breakfast two or three mornings after.

"Pottler, of the Three Kings, I hope," said Beau, helping himself to a devil, "if you do what you ought."

"The Three Kings be shot!" said Fitz. "The barmaid there is as ugly as sin, and forty, I'm certain. He's not an eye to trade to keep her; a pretty face at a bar disposes of numberless shilling glasses."

"Old Hops, then, and *do* remember to tell him his beer is better than Bass's," said Beau, whose refractory client gave him no end of trouble.

"What! that stuff, full of jack? Oh! confound it, I can't humbug like that; 'tisn't in my line, especially with those riffraff."

"The devil take your pride!" retorted Beau. "How do you expect to get along with your election, when it's such a piece of work to make you shake hands with even a respectable butcher or——"

"Pah! hold your tongue!" cried the Radical, glancing at his own white fingers. "I like the hydra-headed to have all the bread he wants, but I can't bear touching his dirty hands. I'm sure I make love to the women, Beau, though, with most exemplary perseverance——"

"Rather too perseveringly," growled the exigeant Beau. "I don't think it tells well with the fathers, and I'm quite sure it influences husbands the wrong way. You're unexceptionable with your equals, but Rumpunch himself isn't more unmanageable than you are with your inferiors. I always notice if a gentleman—I mean a thorough-bred one—takes up democracy, and all that, opinions, the more exclusive, as sure as a gun, does he grow in his actions. He may put on the *bonnet rouge* with the people, but he'll always expect the people to doff theirs to him. Well, it's human nature, I suppose; we're all anomalies——"

"For Heaven's sake, don't begin to moralise, Beau," said Fitz. "Of all the abominations that pester the earth, the didactic style is the worst. Well! will you come with me to the Larches?"

"The where?" shouted Beau, in amazement.

"The Larches; the Barnardistons' place."

Beau dropped some cutlet, en route to his lips, off his fork, in staring at Fitz. "Are you mad? Why he's on Verdant's committee."

"What of that? I've walked about ten entire days to meet his daughter, and haven't met her: sequitur, I shall call there."

Beau gave a grunt of wonder and disgust. "Of all the cool hands, I *do* think you're the very coolest."

"Of course I am. Have you only now found it out? Ring the bell, and order the horses."

"Well," said Beau, with a touching air of resignation, "if you'd keep quiet, and do as you're told, I'd bring you in as sure as this beer's Brighton Tipper; but since you *will* act for yourself, why, if you lose your election, *I* wash my hands of it."

Up to the Larches rode Fitz and I, a pretty house of very white stone, and with very green Venetians, that tried hard to look like an Italian villa on a small scale, and failed signally —standing in its grounds at the west end of Cantitborough.

"There she is," whispered Fitz, as we paced up the carriage drive. True enough, stooping over a bed of verbena, gardening sedulously, with Dauphin barking furiously round her, in ecstatic delight, was our late travelling companion. At the sound of our horses' hoofs the poodle rushed at us, after the manner of small dogs, and his mistress turned round to see the cause of his irritation. Off went Fitz's hat, and he bowed to his saddle-bow. At the same moment a young lady came out of a French window, and called "Cora!" Dauphin's mistress threw down her trowel, obeyed the summons, and went into the house; not without a bow to Fitz, though. "The devil! she *is* Glencora, and engaged to that owl then," swore Fitz. "I say, she hasn't one bit the cut of a parson's *future*, has she? Upon my word it's a pity—horrid waste of good material—to throw *her* into the Church's arms! Never mind, though; it will be the more fun for me. I shan't only have a flirtation, but the fun of making him jealous."

"Glad you take it so philosophically, but it won't do you much good in the borough to flirt with their pet preacher's fiancée."

"Hold your tongue. If I prefer a flirtation to a seat in the Commons, mayn't I indulge my preference?" said the candidate for Cantitborough, throwing his bridle to Soames, as a Buttons, that one wanted a microscope to see clearly, opened the door, and ushered us into the library of the hottest out-and-out Tory in the county.

There sat old Barnardiston in state, a tall, plethoric-looking fellow, the very embodiment of conservatism, orthodoxy, and British prejudice. It was as good as a play to see his face when the Radical candidate was shown in, and to see Fitz, with his most nonchalant yet most courtly air, address him, and solicit his vote, as if in perfect ignorance that Lord Verdant's proposer, the Bluest of Blues, Barnardiston, who looked on free-trade as treason to the commonwealth, and on the ballot as a device of Satan, was not perfectly *d'accord* with himself upon politics. The old gentleman, of course, proceeded to bow us out with a good deal of grandiloquent bosh about his principles, which he was evidently very injured to think had not been too widely known to have prevented Fitz's intrusion. Fitz was non-plussed; his call did not promise to be very productive. The old Tory was unpropitious, and there was no sign of the girls whatever. He was just going to take his leave in despair, when, as luck would have it, down came all at once such a shower of hailstones, such claps of thunder, such a conflict of the elements, as the novel-writers say, that, out of common courtesy, the old boy, though it was plain to see that he looked on us as a brace of the most impudent scoundrels he had ever come across, was obliged to ask us if we would wait till it was over. Fitz thanked him, and said he would, in his pleasant, easy manner, as if he and the great Tory were the best possible friends; and (very stiffly, though) Barnardiston, fairly let in for the entertainment of the dangerous sceptic and socialist, asked us to go into the drawing-room.

"Bravo! brass and pluck always win," whispered Fitz aside to me, as the door was opened, and we saw the identical Cora feeding a brace of love-birds in the window, her sister, quite unlike her—a stout, square, business-looking girl—writing district papers, with a lot of tracts round her, and their mamma reading in a dormeuse.

Breathing an inward prayer for the continuance of the thunderstorm, Fitz sat himself down (just under the love-birds), and proceeded to make himself agreeable—especially to the betrothed of the incumbent of St. Hildebrande's. You would have thought him the *enfant de la maison* for the last ten years at least, to hear him talk news and literature with madame, fun and ornithology with mademoiselle, utterly regardless that Barnardiston was keeping a gloomy silence, and the district collector looking glum on her sister's vivacious chat, probably with the eye of a belle-sœur to the absent Whitechurch's interests. He amused them so well, and was so well amused himself, that the sun had stared him in the face for full twenty minutes, and the birds were telling everybody the storm was gone, before Fitz thought proper to find out that it was "beginning to clear up"—a fact so undeniable that he had nothing for it but to make his adieux, after offering to lend Mrs. Barnardiston some book or other she wanted; and when the lodge gates closed behind us, Fitz had a good shout of laughter.

"Now, then, didn't I manage that gloriously?"

"Yes! I never doubted your powers of impudence yet; but whether your election——"

"Confound my election! It was worth losing fifty votes only to see that old boy's face when I asked for his support; and, by George! isn't she pretty? To see all that going to Whitechurch is rather a trial of one's patience. What in the world was she thinking of to throw herself away on him? A little flirtation will be only common humanity to her. Did you see how mischievous she looked when she saw me? The 'good for nothing' was lurking in her mind, I bet you."

"In pleasant contrast with the good in everything of her future sposo. The cardinal virtues ain't relished by women."

Fitz laughed as he pricked Rumpunch into a gallop. "I must have some fun with her. I won't quite spoil her matrimonial speculations, though, for I shan't be inclined to put it *au sérieux*, like the Rev. Augustine. Confound it, there's Jimmy! What in the world is he doing here?"

"Hallo, old boy! how are you?" said the man thus apostrophised, Jimmy Villars, a friend of Fitz's. "I've heard lots about you, Randolph. You're turning Cantitborough upside down, and I'm come to help you."

"That's right. Nobody more welcome. Where are you staying?"

"At the Levisons'—you know them. No? Then you shall immediately. Levison is a great yachting man. Yes, to be sure; *Bonniebelle's* owner; thought you knew him by name. Western of Ireland Club, you remember. He's married now; a very pleasant girl hooked and finished him. They're county people and thorough-going Liberals, so you won't frighten 'em, though they *are* connected with that Arch-Blue old Barnardiston."

"By Jove!" thought Fitz, "'if a man take luck by the horns, don't it always favour him?' Introduce me, then, Jimmy," he said aloud; "I want a little fun. I'm bored to death with committees, canvassing, meetings, dinners, speechifying and letter-writing. Then the Cantitburghers are such awful owls, and one's aims and ends do seem so small when one's mixed up with the bigotry of prejudice and the tomfoolery of party, that I'm growing heartily sick of the whole thing already."

Poor Beau was distracted. Fitz had been a refractory client enough before, so far as obstinately speaking his mind, telling the truth, tilting against his voters' opinions, and entirely refusing to "butter" anybody, went; but after he met Jimmy Villars, Beau had ten times more trouble, for while little Verdant was calling at every house and conquering them all with his title, and Le Hoop Smith was giving to all the charities, and quoting the "Christian Year" largely to the clergy, and Salter was delighting the ten-pound men with coarse jokes, and flinging guineas and stout away recklessly, Fitz, ten to one, was either bothering poor Beau not to bribe, instead of letting things go on quietly; or talking rationalism and liberalism high over the head of some startled constituent (who came off from the interview with the decision that Mr. Fitzhardinge was eminently "dangerous"); or playing billiards, and going eel-netting with Villars and the Levisons; or sitting in Edith Levison's drawing room with her and her cousin, Glencora Barnardiston. Nevertheless, Beau, the sharpest-witted, neatest-handed agent that ever lived, worked away with the settled despair of a man baling water out of a leaking ship with a teacup, and really grew quite worried and anxious in his personal appearance, toiling for the devil-may-care Radical, for whom, ever since Fitz pounded him on their first introduction at Eton, he had always entertained a sort of dogged attachment, something, he used to say, like that of an aged grand-mother for the "poor dear boy" who plagues her life out with crackers, and goes more wrong than all his brothers put together.

The Levisons were, as Jimmy had promised, very pleasant people; and as soon as we were introduced to him, made Fitz and me, and Beau too, if he had had time for such puerilities, welcome to Elm Court, Levison's place, just four miles from Cantitborough, whenever we liked to go there. We went pretty often, for Levison's wife was a merry little thing, and generally had one or two choice spirits like herself driven over to spend the day; among them her cousin and favourite, the fiancée of the Rev. Augustine Whitechurch, a fat, sleek man of large Easter offerings, and touching testimonials; of good family, and wide (Cantitborough) fame, whom everybody praised, though nobody liked, as a sort of voucher for their own religion. I have seen a good many serpents and rabbits, rats and beagles, doves and tiger-cats chained together, but I never saw any pair who seemed to be more uncongenial than Cora and her prétendu. She was lively, witty, high-spirited, and loved mischief as much as she hated Dorcas meetings, missionary reports, and interesting converted beggars, while he was Low Church—*i.e.*, looked upon life as a miserable pilgrimage that it was our duty to make with the hardest possible peas in our shoes; wanted a wife the embodiment of that dreadful individual, Hannah More's "Lucilla," and worried poor Cora's very life out with animadversions on her pursuits, amusements, and friends. He came sometimes with her to Elm Court, where he and Fitz took an instantaneous dislike to each other, and kept each other at bay like a cat and a spaniel.

"Do you think you will win your election, Fitz?" asked Villars one evening after dining there, and we were strolling over the grounds afterwards in the twilight.

"Haven't an idea, my dear fellow," responded Fitz, cheerfully, "and am not sure that I wish; for the Cantitburghers are such awful idiots that to represent them faithfully I should be compelled to buy a pair of ass's ears, like Bottom, which might produce a peculiar sensation in the House."

"Especially," smiled Cora, "as the cap would fit so many of its members."

"Those that are 'good for nothing' included."

She laughed and coloured.

"Oh, I had hoped you had not recognised me. What a shame to keep it secret all this time. I might have been begging your pardon in a long oration every time we met. I shall take care how I talk to strangers again in a train."

"Pray don't. I'm exceptional in my taste, I know, but I do like truths sometimes, even if they hit hard. Don't you?"

"Yes; but I fancy my truth didn't hit you severely at all. I think I told you you were condemned as a sceptic, a socialist, and a republican: and, since all clever men have been classed into one of the three, you should be super-excellent to combine the trio."

Fitz laughed.

"I am quite content to be condemned by Cantitborough to any amount, so long as *you* don't find me utterly 'good for nothing.'"

She looked up at him merrily.

"Certainly; you are good for waltzing, billiards, and German songs; those are all the duties I require of you, so I don't ask any further."

"I only wish you required more," said Fitz, softly. "I am sorry you think of me as a passing acquaintance, chatted with in a ball-room, and parted from without regret, to meet no more in the eddies of society."

"I never said that I considered you so," interrupted Cora, hurriedly, snapping the roses off their stems as they walked along.

"But you implied it; and if you knew the pain your light words cause you would not speak them."

She was silent, so was he. It was part of Fitz's code of warfare to leave his sentences to bear their fruit.

"Glencora, you are extremely imprudent to be out in this damp atmosphere in such a light evening dress," said the Rev. Augustine at her elbow.

"This exquisite evening! Thank you for your care, but I don't belong to the sanitary-mad individuals," replied Miss Glen, impatiently. "I never cloak up, so never take cold; if I do, I will apply to you for some of those extraordinary little hundreds and thousands you carry in the morocco case, and physic the parish with, in alternate doses of texts and globules."

"Ah! *do* you believe in those little comfits, Mr. Whitechurch," said Fitz, taking up the warfare. "You save the souls and the bodies en même temps—a very nice arrangement, I dare say. It must be delightful to practise the two healing arts at once; and then, if you *should* ever chance to mistreat a case, it wouldn't so much matter, because you'd have made sure your patient was 'fit' to die, whether he were willing or not. Homœopathy's a capital thing for trade. I'm very glad to see it spreading; they say the undertakers bid fair to be some of the wealthiest men in the kingdom through it, and the sugar-bakers thrive amazingly."

"It requires no wit to jest upon deep subjects," said Whitechurch, loftily. "The holiest topic, the gravest matter, can of course be turned into ridicule."

"If it is weak, certainly."

"No, sir! Not if it is weak, but if its opponents are bigoted and coarse-mouthed. Ridicule was thrown upon Moses's divining-rod——"

"And he turned it into a serpent, and made it eat up all the other rods, which was ingenious, if not Christian."

"All the borough are acquainted with your latitudinarian opinions, Mr. Fitzhardinge."

"Are they?" laughed Fitz. "They must be rather a treat to Cantitborough, after all the Conservative oratory it has expended on it. By the way, Mr. Whitechurch, that election sermon of yours last Sunday was an admirable hit. I heard Lord Cockadoodle say that he wished old Ewen would kick off, and leave Dunslope in his gift."

Whitechurch coloured. The sermon was a gross piece of toadyism, and though he did keep his affections on things above, he couldn't help sometimes taking a glance downwards, where the fat living of Dunslope was among the prominent points that caught his eye.

Cora sighed quickly, turned round, and said something about going into the house.

"Do," said Fitz, bending towards her. "Let us go and try those German airs."

Go they did, and Fitz's cornet, which he played as well as Kœnig, sent out its sweet notes in a concert of sweet sounds, which was anything but harmonious to the ears of the incumbent of St. Hildebrande as he walked up and down before the drawing-room windows, listening to Caroline, who, regarding him already as a brother, took the liveliest interest in his parochial business affairs, doubtless with the kindly view of covering her sister's short-comings in that line.

"Poor dear Cora!" I heard her sigh, as she passed me when I was smoking on the terrace with Jimmy. "Don't be annoyed with her, Augustine. She *does* flirt a little, perhaps, but they say all pretty women do. I'm not tempted, you know; I am plain and unpretending; but, thank Heaven! my thoughts are not fixed on this world, or on men's idle admiration. Don't be vexed with her; she is thoughtless, I am afraid."

"But I am extremely annoyed," said the parson's dictatorial tones. "I spoke to her the other day about fixing the time for our marriage. I require a wife; I cannot attend to the schools, and the cook wastes a great deal; but she put me off—would give me no answer. *I* am not to be treated so lightly; and as for her dancing, and singing, and riding with those idle men, especially with that wild dissolute Fitzhardinge, it is intolerable, unbearable, most indecorous——"

"I know it is very sad," chimed in the gentle Cary. "But dear Glen never had any due sense of the responsible position your wife will occupy. She is careless, worldly——"

Here they went out of hearing, and I was no further enlightened, but went into the drawing-room, where they were all playing vingt-et-un, and called to me to join them; and I thought, as I saw Cora, with her large hazel eyes full of animation, Verdant gazing at her sentimentally on her left, and Fitz discoursing with eloquent glances and facile compliment on her right, her light laugh ringing through the room, and her merry talk keeping all going, that it was a thousand pities for her to be imprisoned in the sombre atmosphere of St. Hildebrande's rectory, under the cheerless régime of St. Hildebrande's incumbent, whose gloomy doctrine would infallibly silence the laughter, hush-hush the jest, burn the cards, interdict the waltzing—in short, crush all the native song out of the poor bird he had netted.

"I say, old boy," said I, when we were having a pipe that night in the dining-room at Hollywood, "make hay while the sun shines; you won't have much longer to flirt."

"Why not?" said Fitz, sharply.

"Because Whitechurch wants to get married; not from any particular penchant for the state, or any fresh access of love, but because his girls' schools want looking after, and his cook's ruining him."

"The fool!" ejaculated Fitz, with a giant cloud of Turkish; "why doesn't he go to the register-office, and hire a seamstress and a housekeeper?"

"Possibly because a wife will combine both, and be cheaper. Barnardiston will give his daughters twenty thousand pounds each if he likes his sons-in-law. Fancy Cora arming herself with needles and thread, and teaching half a dozen charity-girls to make pocket-handkerchiefs for Ojibbeways, and going into her kitchen to see that dear Augustine's curry is peppered to a T, or that the cook doesn't encourage the policeman——"

"Faugh! Be quiet, can't you?" growled Fitz, in intense disgust. "You might talk with just as much coolness of Rumpunch being set to run in a costermonger's cart. The idea! What on earth could make her accept him?"

"First offer," interrupted Beau; "couldn't tell she'd get another."

"Pooh! nonsense; at her age girls ain't hard up in that way. If she were thirty she might have been desperate; very rusty hooks are snapped up when there's no longer a chance of silver ones; but at nineteen——"

"Hooks of all kinds are snapped at by all ages," interrupted Beau again, "and you've said so scores of times, Fitz, when it suited you, and your perceptions weren't clouded. Heaven knows why the Clergy trouble themselves to tell women at the end of the marriage-service not to be afraid, with any amazement; there never was more heedless waste of words, for I never knew any of the crinolines who didn't catch at a wedding ring as Rover catches at a mutton-bone."

"I have, though," muttered Fitz. "Some women send away troops of fellows."

"It does puzzle me," said I, "how Glen, with the pick of the county, could choose that parson. She don't like him, I fancy."

"Like him!" cried Fitz, with immeasurable scorn; "how should she? An ugly brute, with the pluck of a chicken."

"Don't call your spiritual pastors and masters bad names, Fitz," said Beau. "You keep me in hourly terror, for if you have a row with the Cantitburgers' pet preacher it'll be all up with your election."

"I shan't have a row with him," sneered Fitz, with much contempt. "I flirt with her because she amuses me, but if she likes the man, she's welcome to him for me."

Though she was so very welcome to him, I heard Fitz in his room (the room is next to mine, and the walls are lath and plaster) mutter to himself as he undressed, "What on earth makes her take that fool?" a question to which I do not suppose either his pipe or his bed-candle, or Rover, who always sleeps by his bedside, or the harvest moon that was looking through the window, vouchsafed him any reply.

The Larches was, of course, forbidden ground to Fitz. He did call there with the book for Mrs. Barnardiston, and was received very cordially by that lady, but in the evening found a note from the old Tory, thanking him for his courtesy, but saying that at least until the "coming important contest" was decided, he thought acquaintance, since their opinions were so opposite, had better not continue. That was a settler; Fitz could not push himself in after that, especially as Fitz would not make himself cheap for a kingdom. Nevertheless, he would find occasion to ride past the Larches, Cora being given to amateur gardening, which generally consisted in gathering the flowers, or throwing guelder-roses at Dauphin, and a very pretty sight she was when she was so occupied, though Caroline considered it childish, and Whitechurch waste of time. By Jove! if one may not dawdle a little time on the road gathering the flowers one finds in life—and precious few there are!—what earthly use, I wonder, do the flowers grow there for?

Past the Larches we were riding one evening after dinner, having spent all the day in election business that had bored us both to death, and very slowly was Rumpunch pacing under the shadow of the shrubberies that divided that stronghold of "Blue" opinion from the high road. Just opposite a break in the laburnums and hawthorns that gave a view through a white gate into the garden, Rumpunch had, or was supposed to have, a nasty stone in his foot—a stone that a man who adored horseflesh as Fitz did was bound to look after. The stone took some moments to find—indeed, I am uncertain that it *was* found after all—but while Fitz was examining the off hoof, through the trees we perceived Whitechurch and his betrothed. Whitechurch looked more pompous than usual, and the serene brow that the ladies of his parish raved about was certainly contracted. Cora looked excited, and rather ready to cry. They drew near the gate, not being able to see us for the trees, and we caught the clergyman's last words—very stiff and icy they were, too.

"You will think over what I have said, Glencora, and I expect you to pay some attention to it. Good-night."

She gave not the slightest response. Whitechurch swung the gate open, and passed down the road with his back to us. Cora stood still, with her eyes on the ground, in a reverie; then she caught Dauphin up, kissed him, burst into tears as she bent over the dog, and walked away through the trees. I glanced at Fitz. His teeth were set like a mastiff's, and he looked after Whitechurch as if he longed to deliver from his left shoulder and floor the retreating figure.

"You'd have improved the occasion better than that, Fitz?"

"Curse the fellow!" muttered the Radical candidate. "I just wish I had him out for a couple of rounds on a quiet morning—a hypocritical idiot, that'll worry all her young life out of her."

With which disconnected remark, and sundry smothered curses, the sight of the farewell having seemingly stirred him into mighty wrath, Fitz sprang on Rumpunch. When he got home he vented it in pipes and whisky, and Beau looked at him as a man might look on a pet hound that he feared was going in for hydrophobia.

"Something's come to Fitz," said Beau, anxiously, "for he's just signed me a large cheque without a word; and I know he wouldn't have given it to me to corrupt the people with without some bother, if he'd known what he was doing."

"I'm going over to Levison's, Beau," said he at breakfast next day. "We're to drive to the Chase, for a sketching party; will you come?"

"I?" growled Beau. "I should think I've something better to do; if I hadn't, the figure at your poll would be a 0. The idea of a man's coming down to stand for a borough, and then going spending all his time with a set of women! I've no patience with you."

"Haven't you, old fellow?" laughed Fitz. "Patience is a virtue, and as no lawyer has any virtues at all, I suppose we can't wonder at you. I did begin enunciating my opinions, but you stopped my mouth."

"Opinions! Pray what have they to do with an election?" retorted Beau. "One would take you for a boy of twenty, talking as if you didn't know everything going on on the face of the earth was an affair of pounds, shillings, and pence. Who the devil cares two straws what opinions you have? Can't you keep 'em quiet, if you will have such things? They hinder a man shockingly. If he's a taste for 'em, he should lock 'em up in his study. You want to get returned——"

"Don't care a hang about it," cried Fitz.

"—for Cantitborough?" continued Beau, too irate to mind the interruption; "and if you do, you should make up your mind to give your money to me and your agents with your eyes shut, as a verger takes a Christmas-box, and to put the stopper for a time on all that liberalist and rationalist stuff. It's all very sensible when shared with the *esprits forts;* but it don't sell just now—it must wait another century or two. If you want to get on with the world, you mustn't frighten it by drawing Truth out of her well; for the world at present is a very great baby, and Truth is its bogy, and makes it run away. But you're as wilful as an unbroke colt, and one might as well talk to this reindeer tongue as to you. So get along to your sketching party; you're out of mischief there."

With which oration, delivered with the spurt of a champagne cork, Beau pushed his plate away, drank a glass of Bass, and ordered a dog-cart to drive into the town, while his obstinate client put his block and his moist colour-box in his pocket, and took his cap to walk over to Elm Court. A nicer place to flirt in than that Chase, with its soft turfy seats, and its thick shadowy woodlands, and its picturesque distance, as an excuse for sketching, it was impossible to find. Fitz was very great at sketching; he made a sketching tour once with one of the "Associates," but to-day the outline of Dauphin's nose was all achieved, for he was chiefly busy mixing Cora's colours, fetching her water, telling her how to tone down this, and deepen that, till——Well, I didn't envy the Reverend Augustine, as his lady-love sat at the roots of an old beech, a little apart from the rest of us, with Fitz lying full length on the turf beside her, as handsome a dog as ever turned a girl's head with his pretty speeches.

Glencora was very shy and quiet with him that day; she, who generally talked nineteen to the dozen. I was listening to the "Princess," which Villars was reading aloud to Mrs. Levison and another fair one, but it really did bore me to such a degree that I was obliged to get out of sound to where I could light a pipe without offending female nerves. I was near Fitz, who was smoking—permitted the indulgence by Cora, who has no nonsense about her—and I caught the end of his sentence as he lay looking up at her, and gathering the ferns with his left hand. Fitz has a quiet way of flirting, but it's a very effective one.

"No; I don't wish to win the election," he was saying. "My views have changed since I came down here."

"What? has Cantitborough air turned you Blue?"

"Not exactly; but since, when I leave Cantitborough, I shall be forgotten as a mere acquaintance by those who have made the place dear to me, I shall never set foot in it again. Isn't it old North, in the 'Noctes,' who says, 'there are places in this earth that we shudder to revisit, haunted by images too beautiful to be endured'? *I* feel the truth of that now."

"By George!" thought I, "Fitz is growing very serious. Won't poor Cora credit it all, and never dream it will be talked in the same strain to some new listener next month!"

"Will you give me that sketch?" Fitz went on, after a pause, in which the ferns had come to considerable grief. "It is much to ask, but I should like some memorial of days that I shall never forget, though you will."

"Do you think I shall ever forget them?"

The temptation to revenge yesterday's scene was too sweet to be resisted. Fitz drew her down towards him. "Will you promise me that——"

But Cora sprang up, scattering her materials to the four winds. "Hush, hush, you must not speak so to me; you do not know——"

What he didn't know never appeared, for Mrs. Levison turned her head over her shoulders, saying,

"Glen, darling, have you any ultramarine? I can't find mine."

Glen went towards her, and Fitz rose with a worried, anxious look on his face, very different to the fun his love affairs generally brought him.

"Why did your cousin engage herself to Mr. Whitechurch?" asked he, point blank, of Mrs. Levison, finding himself alone with her for two minutes before dinner that night.

"Ah; isn't it a pity? a dreadful man like that, who'll think it sinful for her to waltz or go to the Opera. If Gerald wouldn't let me waltz, or have a box, I would sue for a separation tomorrow."

"But why accept him?" said Fitz, impatiently.

"That was all my uncle's doing," answered Edith. "He's terribly mean, you know, without the slightest reason to be so. Glencora came home from school at seventeen. Augustine proposed for her. My uncle thought it a good match, and ordered her to accept him; her mamma begged her not to go against her papa. Poor Cora, as thoughtless as my canary-bird, never knew the misery she was making for herself, and consented. She has been miserable ever since! They've been engaged two years; and," continued Edith, with immense energy, "Mr. Fitzhardinge, I'd as soon see her joining the Poor Clares as wearing orange-blossoms for *that* man!"

So would Fitz, probably, on the well-known principle of the dog in the manger; a very natural principle, especially when one has a fancy to eat the straw oneself. He did not say so, however.

Whitechurch came to dine that night at Elm Court. The dinner was not so lively as usual, for Fitz and Cora, generally the fastest hitters in the tennis-ball of conversation, might have been Gog and Magog set down at the table for any amusement they afforded the society.

After dinner at Elm Court we were wont to take our cigars about in the grounds instead of over the wine in the glorious sultry August evenings. Levison went after his wife—he was still actually in love with her—Fitz lighted an Havannah and strolled off by himself, and Jimmy and I sat down in a Robinson Crusoe hut to have a chat about the Cambridge Eight, the October meetings, and other subjects we had in common. Villars was just telling me how it was that Long Fortesque happened to make such a pot of money on the Cesarewitch, when, through the thick shrubs and young trees that surrounded our smoking-room, I caught a glimpse of Cora's pink dress as she stood in earnest talk with somebody or other invisible to us.

"Oh! hang it, Jimmy," said I, "there's another love-scene going on; let's get out of the way."

"Keep still, young one, rather," retorted Villars, "or you may just walk into the middle of it, and smash all the fun. Is it that dear little pet, and Fitz making a fool of himself about her? It's abominable to listen, but, boxed up here, one can't help it. Fitz would soon shoot us if we walked out in his face and spoiled sport. Besides, we shan't hear anything new; love-scenes are all alike."

This, however, seemed far from being a love-scene. Cora was speaking impetuously and hurriedly.

"I have acted very wrongly, I know I have. A girl always does, if she engages herself where she cannot give her affection. I beg your pardon for having misled you. I blame myself very much for not having spoken frankly to you long ago, and asked you to release me from an engagement I can never fulfil."

"It is a pity you did not think so long ago," replied Whitechurch, sententiously.

"It *is* a pity. I wish to Heaven I had."

"I dare say you do! You say very justly that we are ill suited to each other; our tastes, and aims, and pursuits are utterly alien. I was lured, I confess, by your personal attractions. I trusted that the good seed, once sown, might flourish in so fair a soil; but I was deceived. You have only forestalled me in the rupture of our engagement. I confess that I dared not take a helpmate out of Philistia, and I have learned that there are treasures elsewhere superior to the ephemeral charms of mere exterior beauty."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," retorted Cora, haughtily. "Our want of congeniality cannot have struck you more forcibly than it has done me. You will, at least, do me the justice to admit that I never simulated an affection I could not feel."

"Certainly; we part in peace, and shall, I trust, meet again on perfectly friendly terms."

"He'll take Cary, mark my word," said Villars, as the incumbent of St. Hildebrande's raised his hat, and left her. "All her district visiting and ragged school teaching hasn't been without an eye to business, I'll bet."

Cora, fancying herself alone, threw herself down on a turf seat under a mountain-ash, looking pretty enough, with the sunset lighting up her bright dress and uncovered hair, while she sat in thought, out of which Dauphin, by the application of a cold nose, the wagging of a short tail, and many impatient barks, vainly tried to rouse her.

"Pretty she looks, don't she?" whispered Villars. "Do for the Sleeping Beauty, if her eyes were shut. Why don't Fitz play the Knight's part?"

He'd scarcely spoken when the scent of an Havannah floated to us on the evening wind, and along the shrubbery path came Fitz, with his arms folded, and his eyes on the ground. Dauphin ran up to him in an ecstatic state of welcome. Cora started up, her cheeks flushing as bright-hued as the sky, and said something highly unintelligible about its going to rain, which, seeing there wasn't a cloud in the heavens, seemed looking far into futurity indeed. Fitz didn't answer her with regard to her atmospheric prophecies, but, throwing away his cigar into the middle of an oleander, he began where he had left off in the morning.

"Cora, my darling," he murmured, "I beseech you listen to me! I seem never to have hated or to have loved till now. For Heaven's sake, free yourself from those accursed ties, and give yourself to me——"

"The deuce!" muttered Jimmy, when Glencora had whispered that she was free, and the Radical candidate had pledged himself with every vow under the sun to the great Blue's daughter, and they had strolled away among the shrubberies, "since Fitz has got up the steam and come it *au serieux* like this, a spavined 'bus horse may enter itself for the Derby. A pretty fellow he is to come canvassing; but one might have been sure what sort of an election *he*'d try for when hazel eyes like those were in the way."

I suppose Fitz found this style of canvassing more to his taste, for the harvest moon was high in the heavens, and the nightingale was jug-jugging in the cool woodlands, and the ladies had sung two or three songs after the coffee, before he and Cora walked in through the bay-window.

To see Beau's face when Fitz told him he had turned out Whitechurch!

"Well, I *do* think you're gone clean mad, Randolph," he began, when he recovered his first breathless horror. "To fly in the face of the borough like that—to steal their pet parson's fiancée—to outwit their most influential householder—to get yourself called every name they can lay their tongues to—how the deuce do you think that's likely to forward your election?"

Fitz lay back and laughed without stopping for five minutes.

"You may laugh," growled Beau. "You won't laugh when you see four thousand five hundred pounds six shillings and eightpence gone, and nothing to show for it."

"That's your fault," put in Fitz, "for spending such a lot on unholy purposes. What sort of a face would you show before an Election Committee?"

"I should like to know," continued Beau, more furious every word he uttered, "what a *woman* is worth to lose an election for? Women are as cheap as green peas, but you won't find free boroughs as easy to come by. A pretty row we shall have in the town! Won't the Blues print placards about you! Won't there just be choice epithets chalked after your name on the walls! Won't the *Cantitborough Post* catch hold of it, and rake up every one of your love affairs; and pretty nice ones some of 'em are, since I was called in to settle 'em! Won't old Blue Bar move heaven and earth to keep you out! Well, all I can say is, that you're more fit for a private asylum than a rational hustings."

With which final philippic Beau flung himself out of the room, too irate to hear Fitz call after him.

"Take my compliments to the editor of the *Cantitborough Post*, and ask him to be so kind as to print, next week, in the biggest capitals he has, that I consider a touch of Cora's lips worth a premiership! Don't forget, Beau? And, I say, you may add, too, that Blue and Yellow are two of the primary colours, and intended to unite from earliest memory."

Beau was quite right. The Blues were frantic with delight at being able to damage the Yellow member, who, somehow, had been making ground in spite of them; and Barnardiston was furious, not because Whitechurch was thrown over, for Whitechurch had turned his affections towards the good working qualities of Caroline, but because the man he hated worst in the whole county—handsome, reckless, bold, republican Fitz—had cheated him out of the chance of a coronet. The very day

Cora accepted Randolph she refused little Lord Verdant, and so enraged was the great Tory, that he told Cora to leave his roof, and sent Fitz's letters back unopened. Cora, who, having her mamma on her side, however, did not mind it much, took refuge with Edith Levison, Levison himself being indignant with Barnardiston for his folly; and in the sultry summer days and the long summer evenings Fitz and Miss Glen passed many a pleasant hour under the shady trees of Elm Court, while in the little bigoted, quarrelling, peppery town, four miles off, the Cantitborough men were blackening his name in committee-rooms, and the Cantitborough women were pulling her to smithereens at their tea-fights.

The day that beats the Derby for stirring English phlegm into mad excitement—the day when Blue and Yellow ride rampant against each other—the day when the demon of Party breaks loose—when the Unwashed smash each other's heads to their full satisfaction, when voters are locked up in durance vile and plied with hocussed grog, and turn hither and thither by distracted cabs—when men work, and wear, and quarrel, and growl, and swear by a bit of blue ribbon, as if it were the sole stay of the country, and grasp at a yellow banner as though it were the mainstay of liberty—the election-day dawned on Cantitborough, the sun shining extra bright, as if laughing with its jolly round face at the baby play these little pigmies below fancied of such universal importance.

The nomination day arrived, and each separate Cantitburgher uprose from his bed with the solemn conviction that the destinies of England hung on his own individual hands. Beau splashed through his bath with the rapidity of a water-dog, brushed his whiskers as hastily as a Cantab too late for chapel, and dressed himself in much the same eager excitement as a Cornet harnessing for his first parade.

"Seven o'clock, and that fellow not up!" growled Beau, performing a fanfaronade on his candidate's door.

"What the devil are you making that row for?" responded Fitz. "Why *can't* you take things quietly?"

"If I had, I wonder how you'd stand," swore Beau, "on the poll to-day? Not up! when Smith, and Salter, and Verdant will be in the town by nine, full fig, and all your committee will be looking out for you at half-past at the Ten Bells!"

Fitz laughed.

"You get your breakfast, and go into Cantitborough, whether I'm up or not. And, I say, Beau, send Soames to me, and order some one to saddle Rumpunch, will you?"

"Go into Cantitborough without *him!* He's certainly mad," muttered Beau, in soliloquy. Being, however, of a philosophic turn of mind, he and I ate a good breakfast, though ungraced by the presence of our host. "Why is that fellow so late?" he asked fifty times to each cup of coffee. "Eight o'clock, by Jove! and we shall be a mortal hour getting into procession and going to the town. Do ring the bell—ring it loud. Thank you. James, go and see if your master is up."

"Can't make anybody hear, sir," said James, returning.

"Not hear? Bless my soul, it's very extraordinary!" said Beau, looking the picture of unutterable worry and woe. "Fitz must have taken an overdose of opium. Confound him! What did he get in love for? I'll call him myself."

Up went Beau and battered at the door, with not the slightest success.

"I say, Fitz! Fitz! are you deaf, or dead, or what?" shouted Beau, forgetting that in the event of either hypothesis Fitz would be the last person calculated to give him an answer.

"God bless me!" cried Beau, bursting the door open, "where *are* you? If ever there was a wayward, obstinate, provoking——" Beau stopped in astonishment too great for speech. The room was empty, the bed empty, Fitz, Rover, and Soames departed, all the drawers open, a portmanteau on the floor, and shirts, and coats, and brushes, and boots tossed about as when a man has packed in a hurry and left behind all the things he will not want. "Bolted, by Heaven!" cried Beau. "Where's he gone? What's he done? He is mad—he must be mad! Send the servants off everywhere! Where, in the devil's name, can he be flown? Oh, curse it, what *is* to be done?"

That was more than I could tell him. We did send the men everywhere, but they could not find their master, nor Soames either. Beau had a faint idea of dragging the pond, in case Fitz had thrown himself into a watery grave; but then it was not probable that Soames was immolated as well. Nine o'clock struck; there were the Yellow men with the Yellow banners, and the Yellow ribbons, and the Yellow agents, and the Yellow band, and no Yellow candidate! In that half-hour I am sure poor Beau lost as much flesh as a jockey before the Derby. "Well, we must go," said he, in sheer desperation. "Perhaps he'll turn up in the town; if not, we must tell 'em he's seriously ill. By George! I wish he'd been at York before he brought me on such a fool's errand."

Into Cantitborough we rode, with many shouts and enthusiastic rushes out from the cottages we passed; and into the market-place we went with great row and glory, save that we were a procession without a head. There was little Verdant, meeker than ever after Cora's rejection, looking like a noodle, with his father and a galaxy of titles at the head of his procession; and there was Le Hoop Smith, bland and smiling, at the head of his; and fat, yellow old Salter at the head of his. But where was Fitz—the handsome, dashing Fitz, whom the women were crowded to admire and the mob to cheer?—who, thanks to untiring Beau, was grown popular even in Blue Cantitborough? And when the Blues saw not Rumpunch and his rider, were they not frantic with triumph? and were not Fitz's committee in an agony of wonder and dread, and the women in a state of bemoaning agony and woe, and the mob in a frantic fit of excitement and indignation, after the custom of mobs from all ages downwards? And was not Beau—poor Beau—distracted in his own mind, and worried like a fox with fifty packs after him—more inimitably cool, and confident, and matchless, than any man could possibly be pictured, when he set the mayor's hair straight upon end with an account of the frightful attack of cholera that had seized poor Fitz in the morning; distracted the committee with assurances that he had left their candidate as blue as the lapis-lazuli ring on his finger, and in mortal danger of his life; appealed so touchingly to the enlightened men of Cantitborough not to allow the unfortunate invalid's cause to be injured; and conducted himself altogether so brilliantly, that the Blues whispered in knots in dismay?

Yes, Beau was magnificent that day, I confess, though he did push me aside as a thundering muff when I made a mistake, and told one of the committee my cousin had broken his ankle the night before—yes, Beau was glorious, I admit.

The proceedings began with the crier's bell and the mayor's oration, which was entirely unheard from calls from the crowd of "Go it, old Baldhead!" "Speak up, old Malt-and-Hops!" "How many nine gallons did Salter order?" and like personal allusions to his occupation. Then uprose old Barnardiston, who was not very cordially received, for the simple reason that he was the hardest magistrate on the bench; however, the Blues cheered him to the skies when he proposed as a fitting representative for the free, loyal, honourable, enlightened, and all the rest of it borough, the son of the noble and generous House of Cockadoodle, the benefactors and patrons of Cantitborough. After his seconder came two out-and-out Blues, who proposed the gentle and intellectual Le Hoop Smith, of Hooping Hall, Pottleshire; and two more, who put forward that public-spirited, benevolent and large-hearted gentleman, Curry Salter, late of the Bengal Infantry; and then two Liberals arose, in a wild storm of mad cheers and savage yells, to offer to the borough, as a member, Ralph Fitzhardinge, Esq., of Hollywood and Evensdale, who had been most unhappily stricken down by illness at the very moment he was mounting his horse, to come and have the honour of addressing them in person.

And now up got little Beau, as plucky as a game-cock, and began to tell them how it was that he was compelled to take their candidate's place. So ingeniously did he apologise for Fitz; so delightfully did he set the crowd screaming at his witticisms; so mercilessly did he show up his opponents' weak points; so admirably did he describe Fitz's opinions much better than Fitz would have done himself, who would have talked Mill and Comte and frightened them with his daring; so pathetically did he implore them not to let the great Liberal cause be prejudiced by an unavoidable accident, that the mob cheered him, as if he had been the Queen and they Etonians, hurrahed for Fitzhardinge till their throats were hoarse, and even some determined Blues were caused to waver in their minds. The hands clad in kid, doeskin, silk, cashmere, or dirt, as it might chance, that lifted themselves out from the tumultuous sea of shouting, struggling, fighting Blues and Yellows, were declared in favour of Lord Verdant and Randolph Fitzhardinge! Beau's triumph was magnificent; it smashed hollow all the mural crowns that ever were manufactured; and it was worth a guinea to see him in it, mercurial as quicksilver, rapid as a champagne cork, sharp as a ferret on his foes, and winning as a widow bent on conquest to his friends, haranguing these, arguing with those, thanking a fat councilman, and pledging a thin churchwarden, talking up for the Queen and down for the Pope, agreeing with everybody and offending none, telling them poor Fitz was Prussian Blue when he left him, and rapidly progressing towards Indigo, but had now taken a favourable turn, as he had just heard by a messenger, thanks be to, &c., &c.

Yes, Beau was grand on that day, and never more effective than when, at twelve o'clock at night, having shaken the last hand, and drunk the last glass, and talked the last solemn talk with the solemn committee, he sprang on his horse in the Ten Bells yard to tear over to Hollywood to see how his poor friend was. He had just his foot in the stirrup, and I was on my hack, receiving no end of condolences for my cousin's most ill-timed attack from three or four of the principal of the committee, when a hand was laid on my knee, and an awful voice, which I knew only too well, said, in tones, the facsimile of the first tragedian's at the Royal Grecian,

"Sir, you are a scoundrel and a liar!"

"Hallo!" said I, "mild language! I am used to gentlemen, not to Billingsgate. What the devil do you mean——"

"What do *you* mean, sir," stormed Mr. Barnardiston, "by daring to come before an assembly of upright, loyal, God-fearing citizens with a lie on your lips? What do *you* mean by joining in a vile plot to trick a whole community, and rob a parent of a child——"

"Take care, old gentleman; you're talking libel," interrupted Beau, pleasantly. "The cognac's been too much for you. Go home and sleep it off, for it don't do for the Romans to see their pet Cincinnatus a little the worse for——"

"Hold your tongue, sir," screamed Barnardiston, purple with rage, "or, by Heaven, I'll find a way to make you! How dared you come here—both of you—and tell the whole borough that the cursed villain you call friend and cousin—"

"Gently, gently, my dear sir; remember how you compromise yourself," put in Beau, with most solicitous courtesy.

"The consummate rascal," pursued Barnardiston, fiercer than ever, waxing into sarcasm—"I mean the honourable gentleman, the noble-hearted, high-spirited Liberal candidate, who has sneaked out of a contest in which he knew he could not win, and ordered his obliging agent and his boy-cousin to chicane a whole town with some garbled folly of the cholera to screen his private marriage with the daughter of one whom her father would sooner see——"

"Eh?—what?—what did you say? *Married!*" cried Beau, nonplussed for once in his life.

"Ay, sir; married. And you know it as well as I, despite your admirable acting, which would do credit to Mr. Fechter," sneered the Arch-Blue.

"By Heaven, if I *had* known!" swore Beau, furiously; then stopped and changed his tone. "Married, you say, and to your daughter?" he yawned, with all the languid insolence in life. "Well, I congratulate you. You must feel uncommonly pleased; it is a much higher match than you could have looked for."

Barnardiston was perfectly black in the face. He turned himself, with his back to us, and began to harangue the committee-men, who looked scared out of their lives:

"Fellow-citizens!——"

"Ah! that's the correct style," said Beau; "it's so beautifully patriotic."

"Men of Cantitborough, I appeal to you. Judge between me and the honourable gentleman you have chosen to represent you. We have been separated by politics, but we are old fellow-townsmen, and you will give me a patient hearing. Mr. Fitzhardinge comes down to canvass a borough which has only heard of him before through wildness and follies which disgrace his name. He meets a girl—a young girl, an innocent girl—who is betrothed of her own will to one of the purest-minded, sweet-natured men that ever breathed, a man whom you have crowned with the honour of your reverence and esteem——"

"And Easter offerings, with which he buys the whisky that makes his inspiration," interpolated Beau.

"A man whom you all revere and love, and whose heart is locked up in this young girl's affections——"

"Or her possible twenty thousand pounds."

"What does this villain—I can use no milder term, gentlemen—do, but seduce these pure and fond affections from the holy man who once held them; woo her, win her, persuade her to break off the ties of her engagement, and fetter herself anew to him. I refuse my consent, because I know Mr. Fitzhardinge's character too well to peril my child's happiness in his keeping——"

"Because you thought Verdant was hanging after her," interrupted Beau.

"I reject his suit. What does he do? He induces her to brave me with all the open disobedience which cuts so keenly to a father's heart——"

"Turn on Lear—a quotation will save you no end of trouble!" said Beau, kindly.

"He persuades her to go and reside——"

"When you'd turned her out of your house."

"To reside with people to whom I have the most marked objection——"

"Why did you court Levison so hard, then, to take your pretty niece?"

"The most marked objection. I distinctly forbid her marriage. She wants two years of her majority; and so this scoundrel!——Passion gets the better of me, sirs!"

"Or Cockadoodle's comet wine does."

"When I tell you that Mr. Fitzhardinge takes the day of his nomination—the day he knew I should be tied to town endeavouring to serve my country's interests—to marry my poor child privately, with no witnesses but the Levisons, in the church at Elm Court, at ten o'clock this morning, I need comment no further on the miserable trick by which you, gentlemen, and all the rest of Cantitborough, have been duped to-day. I only ask you, as fellow-townsmen, once private friends, and always, I hope, friends in the common cause of truth and honour, to side with me, and never allow this destroyer of home peace, this unprincipled breaker of every public and domestic law, to represent in the senate of our nation this free, loyal, and Protestant borough."

"Gentlemen, hear my version," began Beau.

"Will you listen to a villain's tool?" pursued Barnardiston.

"I give you my honour——" cried Beau.

"What is his honour worth?" shouted Barnardiston.

"Will you hear me?"

"Will you believe him?"

Tumultuous was the scene, frightful the commotion, terrific the tempest of Blue and Yellow which raged over devoted

Cantitborough; Blues and Yellows swarmed into the Ten Bells yard; Blues and Yellows surged round mine and Beau's horses; Blues and Yellows asked frantically what was the row, and carrying off but an unintelligible version, proceeded, as the next best plan, to kick up a row on their own account. They screamed, and shouted, and pummelled each others' shoulders, and punched each others' heads, and hissed, and yelled, and swore, and cudgelled, and

> Fought as only men can fight who know no reason why.

In vain the Yellow agent tried to speak. Every elegant missile that the dark night could allow to come to hand was pelted at him and me; in vain the Blue leaders tried to turn the tumult to account; the mob, who being in a mood to pelt, would have pelted the moon could they have got at her, forced them to retreat, covered with much obloquy and still more rotten eggs. Smash, crash, went half the windows in the place; ladies rushed from their couches in nightcaps and hysteria; policemen turned and fled, or used their truncheons in some private grudge; not a Town and Gown row, even with Fighting Bob or the first of the Fancy in surplice and mortar-board to help us, ever beat it; and at last, in sheer desperation, having satiated ourselves with enough hard hitting to last a twelvemonth, Beau and I set spurs to our horses, and knocking down, at a low computation, some three hundred men and boys, fought our way out of the town, and galloped on to Hollywood in silence.

"By Heaven!" said Beau, through his set teeth, as he threw himself down at last in the arm-chair of the dining-room, thoroughly done up for the first time in his life—"by Heaven! if I'd known Fitz was such a fool, I'd have seen him at the devil before he'd made one of me too. The election's lost, smashed, ruined. I may as well withdraw his name from the poll. To go and disgrace himself before all the county; to go and offend his constituents, and his county, and everything worth considering, from a ridiculous fancy for a little flirt whom he'll be wishing at Jericho in twelve months' time — four thousand pounds fifteen shillings and eightpence gone for nothing! I'm a cool man—a very cool man, generally—but I confess this does get the better of me. How shall I ever forget, or how will all Cantitborough forget, my being brought down here only to tell a parcel of lies, and not *succeed* through them, even? By Jupiter!" and Beau sprang up from his chair and dashed his hand down on the table with an impetus that made the bottles and glasses on it leap up terrified into the air—"by Jupiter! I swear I'll never speak to your madman of a cousin, or to his confounded wife, as long as I live—never! I, the sharpest dog in all Lincoln's Inn, to be done green like this!"

With which pathetic summary poor Beau fell back again into his chair, and opened his lips no more that night. The morrow dawned; the poll was opened; Beau, like a plucky soldier, sticking to his colours as long as there was a rag of them left, rode into Cantitborough early, and I with him, and made his way to the polling-booth in the midst of the yells, and shouts, and fiendish exclamations, and laughter, and derision of the mob, who swarmed through the streets still strewn with the débris of the midnight conflict. In vain did Beau seek a hearing from his chief constituents; in vain did he try to gather round him the committee; in vain did he try to rally round him even a few straggling troopers to make a stand with him in this Thermopylæan fix. In vain! The Cantitburghers had been duped, and when did ever Christian live with magnanimity enough to pardon that? The news of Fitz's marriage had spread throughout the town; the ladies were furious against Cora for having wedded the only handsome man who had been seen in Cantitborough for the last ten years. They made their husbands, and sons, and fathers, solemnly promise to withdraw their vote from such a wicked creature, and the husbands, and sons, and fathers, some liking to buy religious reputation cheap by siding with the pet parson, and others having Fitz's money already in their pockets, determining to hold virtuously aloof from the contest, vowed the required vow, and the tide of public adoration set steadily in for Verdant and Le Hoop Smith.

The committees sat in their respective rooms, the mob round the booth danced, and shouted, and yelled, in utter contempt of police, the Peelers being *hors de combat* from the past night's fray; Beau, and two or three staunch Liberals, stood firm, with anxious visage and hearts sunk to zero. The tower clock struck four—the poll was closed—the votes stood thus:

Verdant	550
Le Hoop Smith	310
Salter	200
Fitzhardinge	6

Great was the exultation, great the clamour, that arose. You do not need to be told how the Blue banners waved, and the Blue band, inflamed with triumph and stout, began to play, and the Blue members bowed down to the ground, and thanked the noble, intelligent, and generous community which had returned them as their representatives; how the Blues insulted the Yellows with frightful contumely, and how the Yellows, few in flesh but strong in spirit, returned the compliment; and how the Yellow banners struck up the Blue banners when the triumphal procession formed, and Blue heads went down under Yellow fists, and Yellow heroes collapsed beneath Blue boots, and the remaining half of the windows were smashed; and how the uproar was at its height, when into the market-place, spurring on Rumpunch, flecked with foam, came the head and root of it, my brother Fitz, as handsome, as devil-may-care, and as cool as ever.

Louder grew the yells, wilder the shouts, fiercer the row; up in the air flew the eggs and the mud and the sticks and the stones, and all the popular missiles of the Great Unwashed; but steady as a rock stood Rumpunch under Fitz's curb, and firm as a rock sat Fitz himself, in the midst of it. There's nothing like pluck for pleasing or awing the canaille; it is the one thing they will appreciate and revere. Their shouts hushed for a second, and they stopped in their onslaught upon him. He took advantage of it, and held up his hand: "Men, listen to me for a minute!"

They did listen to him, and Fitz went on:

"I hear I have lost my election. I am sorry for it, but I could scarcely expect otherwise; and if I have preferred securing an election of another kind, I hope the constituents of Cantitborough are all too gallant and chivalric gentlemen to disagree with me." Here uprose immense cheering from a few, and laughter even from the enraged community. "I can't alter your decision now, but I'll try to merit a different one next time I contend for the honour of representing you. I have no right to ask any favour at your hands; but, nevertheless, I am going to ask two: the first, that you will clear my cousin, and my agent and friend of any imputation of knowing the true cause of my absence, and any deliberate intention of concealing it by a lie. The other is, that there may be no disunion or bloodshed on my behalf, and no broken heads caused through my fault. Let us all agree to differ; let the victorious go to their homes without insulting the vanquished, and the vanquished without quarrelling with the conquerors for justly earned success. Let us all part in good will, and let my friends go to the Ten Bells and drink my health and that of my bride, if they will be so kind, with three times three!"

It was a queer election speech, and without precedent, certainly, but in the little antiquated borough it told admirably. Never before was seen such an election, without doubt; but, somehow or other, Fitz, going into a new track, and doing such a thing as had never been done, got, all of a sudden, more heartily cheered, applauded, and hurrahed, than the successful candidates themselves. The gentlemen of the town sneered, and ridiculed, and fumed about his speech being most illegal, most unprecedented, most absurd; but the Unwashed, only looking at the pluck, and the manliness of tone, and the flowing taps of the Ten Bells, cheered him vociferously, and would have had the polling done over again if they could.

Beau stood looking on, with his brow knit like a Jupiter Tonans, and turned into the Ten Bells with a grunt.

"That fellow should have lived in the middle ages, with all his confounded folly. And yet, devil take him, why can't one hate him?"

"Will you forgive me, old boy?" laughed Fitz, following him into a private room twenty minutes after.

"Get out!" growled Beau, yet looking lovingly on him nevertheless. "A pretty fellow you are! making yourself look like a fool and everybody else. I should have thought you more a man of sense than to run mad after a mere pretty face. Four thousand five hundred pounds fifteen shillings and eightpence gone for nothing!"

"Never mind, old fellow," laughed Fitz. "Barnardiston would have scented the ceremony, and forbidden it, on any other day; and as to waiting till she was of age, quite out of the question. If her face is not better to look at than the Speaker's, why——"

"Spare me that, spare me that!" cried Beau. "I'll forgive *you*, but I really can't stand *her* praises."

"Come and look at her, and you'll soon forgive her," said Fitz, taking out his watch. "I've made an immense sacrifice to you, Beau, in leaving her at one o'clock to ride over to this little owl of a town, whose animadversions are much more honour than its praise. She's at Sandslope—you know, that place by the sea, ten miles from here. I took her there yesterday, and now I must gallop back to her, or she'll be thinking the Blues and Yellows have eaten me up; and I say, Beau, don't be vexed, dear old boy. I will canvass for the next election in earnest; and when you come over to Sandslope (we don't want you *just* yet), if you don't say that Cora is excuse enough for anything, why you'll be made of granite."

"Hum!" grunted Beau, "I shall always hate her. But that don't matter; give my compliments to her (not my congratulations, for she'll find out that to have *you* for a husband is no matter for felicitation), and tell her that my sister the other day walked down Regent-street with 'Chaste and Elegant, 2*l.* 10*s.*' on her cloak, and that I hope she'll ticket herself the same, 'Mrs. Randolph Fitzhardinge, value 4500*l.* 15*s.* 8*d.*,' for she has cost you that to a certainty."

Apparently Fitz still thinks her worth it, for he has never regretted his hasty step. She did look excuse enough for anything when we saw her a week or two after, when she asked Beau's pardon so prettily and penitentially for the mischief she had done, that Beau, being the very reverse of a stoic, forgave her her sins, only made her solemnly promise to leave Fitz unmolested when next he stood for a free borough. Beau was made amiable, too, that morning, by hearing that Le Hoop Smith would be petitioned against for bribery, and that Barnardiston was already rumoured to repent having treated so cavalierly such a high match for his daughter.

Caroline married Whitechurch; they quarrel night and day at home, but abroad, administer, in amicable concert enough, very big texts and very small globules to their unlucky parishioners. Beau is supremely happy just at present, Fitz having procured for him a recordership, long the object of his desires. And Fitz? Well, Fitz wrote to me this June that he was going yachting in the Levant, with Cora and "three or four *other* pleasant fellows," that Cora is as bright as a sunbeam, and agrees with him in thinking the sherbet, laughter, and delicious bays of the Ionian Isles much better than the odours of the Thames in the senatorial halls of St. Stephen's.

But though they make a jest of it, and think the one election well won and the other well lost, I doubt if Cantitborough has ever forgotten, or will ever forget, the strangest contest that an enlightened borough of the enlightened nineteenth century ever beheld, and if the Cantitburghers will ever cease discussing in news, and drawing, and tap-room the memorable strife of BLUE AND YELLOW.

"REDEEMED."

AN EPISODE WITH THE CONFEDERATE HORSE.

Bertie Winton had got the Gold Vase.

The Sovereign, one of the best horses that ever had a dash of the Godolphin blood in him, had led the first flight over the ridge-and-furrow, cleared the fences, trying as the shire-thorn could make them, been lifted over the stiffest doubles and croppers, passed the turning-flags, and been landed at the straight run-in with the stay and pace for which his breed was famous, enrapturing the fancy, who had piled capfuls of money on him, and getting the Soldiers' Blue Riband from the Guards, who had stood crackers on little Benyon's mount—Ben, who is as pretty as a girl, with his *petites mains blanches*, riding like any professional.

Now, I take it—and I suppose there are none who will disagree with me—that there are few things pleasanter in this life than to stand, in the crisp winter's morning, winner of the Grand Military, having got the Gold Vase for the old corps against the best mounts in the Service.

Life must look worth having to you, when you have come over those black, barren pastures and rugged ploughed lands, where the field floundered helplessly in grief, with Brixworth brook yawning gaunt and wide beneath you, and the fresh cold north wind blowing full in your teeth, and have ridden in at the distance alone, while the air is rent by the echoing shouts of the surging crowd, and the best riding men are left "nowhere" behind. Life must look pleasant to you, if it has been black as thunder the night before. Nevertheless, where Bertie Winton sat, having brought the Sovereign in, winner of the G. M., with that superb bay's head a little drooped, and his flanks steaming, but scarce a hair turned, while the men who had won pots of money on him crowded round in hot congratulation, and he drank down some Curaçoa punch out of a pocket pistol, with his habitual soft, low, languid laugh, he had that in his thoughts which took the flavour out of the Curaçoa, and made the sunny, cheery winter's day look very dull and grey to him. For Bertie, sitting there while the cheers reeled round him like mad, with a singularly handsome, reckless face, long tawny moustaches, tired blue eyes, and a splendid length and strength of limb, knew that this was the last day of the old times for him, and that he had sailed terribly near the wind of—dishonour.

He had been brought to *envisager* his position a little of late, and had seen that it was very bad indeed—as bad as it could be. He had run through all his own fortune from his mother, a good one enough, and owed almost as much again in bills and one way and another. He had lost heavily on the turf, gamed deeply, travelled with the most expensive adventuresses of their day, startled town with all its worst crim. cons.; had every vice under heaven, save that he drank not at all; and now, having shot a Russian prince at Baden the August before, about Lilla Lis, had received on the night just passed, from the Horse Guards, a hint, which was a command, that his absence was requested from her Majesty's Service—a mandate which, politely though inexorably couched, would have taken a more forcible and public form but for the respect in which his father, old Lion Winton, as he was called, was held by the Army and the authorities. And Bertie, who for five-and-thirty years had never thought at all, except on things that pleasured him, and such bagatelles as *barrière* duels abroad, delicately-spiced intrigues, bills easily renewed, the *cru* of wines, and the siege of women, found himself pulled up with a rush, and face to face with nothing less than ruin.

"I'm up a tree, Melcombe," he said to a man of his own corps that day as he finished a great cheroot before mounting.

"Badly?"

"Well, yes. It'll be smash this time, I suppose."

"Bother! That's hard lines."

"It's rather a bore," he answered, with a little yawn, as he got into saddle; and that was all he ever said then or afterwards on the matter; but he rode the Sovereign superbly over the barren wintry grass-land, and landed him winner of the Blue Riband for all that, though Black Care, for the first time in his life, rode behind him and weighted the race.

Poor Bertie! nobody would have believed him if he had said so, but he had been honestly and truly thinking, for some brief time past, whether it would not be possible and worth while tor him to shake himself free of this life, of which he was growing heartily tired, and make a name for himself in the world in some other fashion than by winging Russians, importing new dancers, taking French women to the Bads, scandalising society, and beggaring himself. He had begun to wonder whether it was not yet, after all, too late, and whether if —— when down had come the request from the Horse Guards for him to sell out, and the rush of all his creditors upon him, and away for ever went all his stray shapeless fancies of a possible better future. And—consolation or aggravation, whichever it be—he knew that he had no one, save himself, to thank for it; for no man ever had a more brilliant start in the race of life than he, and none need have better running over the course, had he only kept straight or put on the curb as he went down hill. Poor Bertie! you must have known many such lives, or I can't tell where your own has been spent; lives which began so brilliantly that none could rival them, and which ended—God help them!—so miserably and so pitifully that you do not think of them without a shudder still?

Poor Bertie!—a man of a sweeter temper, a more generous nature, a more lavish kindliness, never lived. He had the most versatile talents and the gentlest manners in the world; and yet here he was, having fairly come to ruin, and very nearly to disgrace.

It was little wonder that his father, looking at him and thinking of all he might have been, and all he might have done, was lashed into a terrible bitterness of passionate grief, and hurled words at him of a deadly wrath, in the morning that followed on the Grand Military. Fiery as his comrades the Napiers, of a stern code as a soldier, and a lofty honour as a man, haughty in pride and swift to passion, old Sir Lionel was stung to the quick by his son's fall, and would have sooner, by a thousand-fold, have followed him to his grave, than have seen him live to endure that tacit dismissal from the service of the country—the deepest shame, in his sight, that could have touched his race.

"I knew you were lost to morality, but I did not know till now that you were lost to honour!" said the old Lion, with such a storm of passion in him that his words swept out, acrid and unchosen, in a very whirlwind. "I knew you had vices, I knew you had follies, I knew you wasted your substance with debtors and gamblers like yourself, on courtesans and gaming-tables, in Parisian enormities, and vaunted libertinage, but I did not think that you were so utterly a traitor to your blood as to bring disgrace to a name that never was approached by shame until *you* bore it!"

Bertie's face flushed darkly, then he grew very pale. The indolence with which he lay back in an écarte chair did not alter, however, and he stroked his long moustaches a little with his habitual gentle indifferentism.

"It is all over. Pray do not give it that tremendous earnestness," he said quietly. "Nothing is ever worth that; and I should prefer it if we kept to the language of gentlemen!"

"The language of gentlemen is *for* gentlemen," retorted the old man, with fiery vehemence. His heart was cut to the core, and all his soul was in revolt against the degradation to his name that came in the train of his heir's ruin. "When a man has forgot that he has been a gentleman, one may be pardoned for forgetting it also! You may have no honour left for your career to shame; *I* have—and, by God, sir, from this hour you are no son of mine. I disown you—I know you no longer! Go and drag out all the rest of a disgraced life in any idleness that you choose. If you were to lie dying at my feet, I would not give you a crust!"

Bertie raised his eyebrows slightly.

"*Soit!* But would it not be possible to intimate this quietly? A scene is such very bad style—always exhausting, too!"

The languid calmness, the soft nonchalance of the tone, were like oil upon flame to the old Lion's heart, lashed to fury and embittered with pain as it was. A heavier oath than print will bear broke from him with a deadly imprecation, as he paced the library with swift, uneven steps.

"It had been better if your 'style' had been less and your decency and your honour greater! One word more is all you will ever hear from my lips. The title must come to you; that, unhappily, is not in my hands to prevent. It must be yours when I die, if you have not been shot in some gambling brawl or some bagnio abroad before then; but you will remember, not a shilling of money, not a rood of the land are entailed; and, by the Heaven above us, every farthing, every acre shall be willed to the young children. *You* are disinherited, sir—disowned for ever—if you died at my feet! Now go, and never let me see your face again."

As he spoke, Bertie rose.

The two men stood opposite to each other—singularly alike in form and feature, in magnificence of stature, and distinction of personal beauty, save that the tawny gold of the old Lion's hair was flaked with white, and that his blue eyes were bright as steel, and flashing fire, while the younger man's were very worn. His face, too, was deeply flushed and his lips quivered, while his son's were perfectly serene and impassive as he listened, without a muscle twitching, or even a gleam of anxiety coming into his eyes.

They were of different schools.

Bertie heard to the end; then bowed with a languid grace. "It will be fortunate for Lady Winton's children! Make her my compliments and congratulations. Good day to you."

Their eyes met steadily once—that was all; then the door of the library closed on him; Bertie knew the worst; he was face to face with beggary. As he crossed the hall the entrance to the conservatories stood open; he looked through, paused a moment, and then went in. On a low chair, buried among the pyramids of blossom, sat a woman reading, aristocrat to to the core, and in the earliest bloom of her youth, for she was scarcely eighteen, beautiful as the morning, with a delicate thorough-bred beauty, dark lustrous eyes, arched pencilled brows, a smile like sunshine, and lips as sweet as they were proud. She was Ida Deloraine, a ward of Sir Lionel's, and a cousin of his young second wife's.

Bertie went up to her and held out his hand.

"Lady Ida, I am come to wish you good-bye."

She started a little and looked up.

"Good-bye! Are you going to town?"

"Yes—a little farther. Will you give me that camellia by way of *bon voyage?*"

A soft warmth flushed her face for a moment; she hesitated slightly, toying with the snowy blossom; then she gave it him. He had not asked it like a love gage.

He took it, and bowed silently over her hand.

"You will find it very cold," said Lady Ida, with a trifle of embarrassment, nestling herself in her dormeuse in her warm bright nest among the exotics.

He smiled—a very gentle smile.

"Yes, I am frozen out. Adieu!"

He paused a moment, looking at her—the brilliant picture framed in flowers; then, without another word, he bowed again and left her, the woman he had learned too late to love, and had lost by his own folly for ever.

"Frozen out? What could he mean?—there is no frost," thought Lady Ida, left alone in her hothouse warmth among the white and scarlet blossoms, a little startled, a little disappointed, a little excited with some vague apprehension, she could not have told why; while Bertie Winton went on out into the cold grey winter's morning from the old Northamptonshire hall that would know him no more, with no end so likely for him as that which had just been prophesied—a shot in a gambling hell.

Facilis descensus Averni—and he was at the bottom of the pit. Well, the descent had been very pleasant. Bertie set his teeth tight, and let the waters close over his head and shut him out of sight. He knew that a man who is down has nothing more to do with the world, save to quietly accept —oblivion.

* * * * * *

It was a hot summer night in Secessia.

The air was very heavy, no wind stirring the dense woods crowning the sides of the hills or the great fields of trodden maize trampled by the hoofs of cavalry and the tramp of divisions. The yellow corn waved above the earth where the dead had fallen like wheat in harvest-time, and the rice grew but the richer and the faster because it was sown in soil where slaughtered thousands rotted, unsepulchred and unrecorded. The shadows were black from the reared mountain range that rose frowning in the moonlight, and the stars were out in southern brilliancy, shining as calmly and as luminously as though their rays did not fall on graves crammed full with dead, on flaming homesteads, crowded sick-wards, poisonous waters that killed their thousands in deadly rivalry with shot and shell, and vast battalions sleeping on their arms in wheat-fields and by river-swamps, in opposing camps, and before beleaguered cities, where brethren warred with brethren, and Virginia was drenched with blood. There was no sound, save now and then the challenge of some distant picket or the faint note of a trumpet-call, the roar of a torrent among the hills, or the monotonous rise and fall from miles away in the interior, of the negroes' funeral song, "Old Joe"—more pathetic, somehow, when you catch it at night from the far distance echoing on the silence as you sit over a watch-fire, or ride alone through a ravine, than many a grander requiem.

It was close upon midnight, and all was very still; for they were in the heart of the South, and on the eve of a perilous enterprise, coined by a bold brain and to be carried out by a bold hand.

It was in the narrow neck of a valley, pent up between rocky shelving ridges, anywhere you will between Maryland and Georgia—for he who did this thing would not care to have it too particularly drawn out from the million other deeds of "derring-do" that the mighty story of the Great War has known and buried. Eight hundred Confederate Horse, some of Stuart's Cavalry, had got driven and trapped and caged up in this miserable defile, misled and intercepted; with the dense mass of a Federal army marching on their rear, within them by bare fifteen miles, and the forward route through the crammed defile between the hills, by which alone they could regain Lee's forces, dammed up by a deep, rapid, though not broad river; by a bridge strongly fortified and barricaded; and on the opposite bank, by some Federal corps a couple of thousand strong, well under cover in rifle-pits and earthworks, thrown up by keen woodsmen and untiring trench-diggers. It was close peril, deadly as any that Secesisa had seen, here in the hot still midnight, with the columns of the Federal divisions within them by eight hours' march, stretching out and taking in all the land to the rear in the sweep of their semicircular wings; while in front rose, black and shapeless in the deep gloom of the rocks above, the barricades upon the bridge, behind which two thousand rifles were ready to open fire at the first alarm from the Federal guard. And alone, without the possibility of aid, caged in among the trampled corn and maize that filled the valley, imprisoned between the two Federal forces as in the iron jaws of a trap, the handful of Southern troopers stood, resolute to sell their lives singly one by one, and at a costly price, and perish to a man, rather than fall alive into the hands of their foes.

When the morning broke they would be cut to pieces, as the chaff is cut by the whirl of the steam wheels. They knew that. Well, they looked at it steadily; it had no terrors for them, the Cavaliers of Old Virginia, so that they died with their face to the front. There was but one chance left for escape; aid there could be none; and that chance was so desperate, that even to them—reckless in daring, living habitually between life and death, and ever careless of the issue—it looked like madness to attempt it. But one among them had urged it on their consideration—urged it with passionate entreaty, pledging his own life for its success; and they had given their adhesion to it, for his name was famous through the Confederacy.

He had won his spurs at Manasses, at Antietam, at Chancellorsville; he had been in every headlong charge with Stuart; he had been renowned for the most dashing Border raids and conspicuous staff service of any soldier in Secessia; he had galloped through a tempest of the enemy's balls, and swept along their lines to reconnoitre, riding back through the storm of shot to Lee, as coolly as though he rode through a summer shower at a review; and his words had weight with men who would have gone after him to the death. He stood now, the only man dismounted, in true Virginian uniform; a rough riding-coat, crossed by an undressed chamois belt, into which his sabre and a brace of revolvers were thrust, a broad Spanish sombrero shading his face, great Hessians reaching above his knee, and a long silken golden-coloured beard sweeping to his waist—a keen reconnoitrer, a daring raider, a superb horseman, and a soldier heart and soul.

When he had laid before them the solitary chance of the perilous enterprise that he had planned, each man of the eight hundred had sought the post of danger for himself; but there he was, inexorable—what he had proposed he alone would execute. The Federals were ignorant of their close vicinity, for their near approach had been unheard, the trodden maize and rice, and the angry foaming of the torrent above, deadening the sound of their horses' hoofs; and the Union-men, satisfied that the "rebels" were entrapped beyond escape, were sleeping securely behind their earthworks, the passage of the river blockaded by their barricade, while the Southerners were drawn up close to the head of the bridge in sections of threes, screened by the intense shadow of the overhanging rocks; shadow darker from the brilliance of the full summer moon that, shining on the enemy's encampment, and on the black boiling waters thundering through the ravine, was shut out from the defile by the leaning pine-covered walls of granite. It was terribly still, that awful silence, only filled with the splashing of the water and the audible beat of the Federal sentinel's measured tramp, as they were drawn up there by the bridge head; and though they had cast themselves into the desperate effort with the recklessness of men for whom death waited surely on the morrow, it looked a madman's thought, a madman's exploit, to them, as their leader laid aside his sword and pistols, and took up a small barrel of powder, part of some ammunition carried off from some sappers' and miners' stores in the raid of the past day, the sight of which had brought to remembrance a stray, half-forgotten story told him in boyhood of one of Soult's Army—the story on which he was about to act now.

"For God's sake, take care!" whispered the man nearest him; and though he was a veteran who had gone through the hottest of the campaign since Bull's Run, his voice shook, and was husky as he spoke.

The other laughed a little—a slight, soft, languid laugh.

"All right, my dear fellow," he whispered back. "There's nothing in it to be alarmed at; a Frenchman did it in the Peninsula, you know. Only if I get shot, or blown up, and the alarm be given, do you take care to bolt over and cut your way through in the first of the rush, that's all."

Then, without more words, he laid himself down at full length with a cord tied round his ankle, that they might know his progress, and the cask of gunpowder, swathed in green cloth, that it should roll without noise along the ground; and, creeping slowly on his way, propelling the barrel with his head, and guiding it by his hands, was lost to their sight in the darkness. By the string, as it uncoiled through their hands, they could tell he was advancing; that was all.

The chances were as a million to one that his life would pay the forfeit for that perilous and daring venture; a single shot and he would be blown into the air a charred and shapeless corpse; one spark on that rolling mass that he pushed before him, and the explosion would hurl him upwards in the silent night, mangled, dismembered, blackened, lifeless. But his nerve was not the less cool, nor did his heart beat one throb the quicker, as he crept noiselessly along in the black shade cast by the parapet of the bridge, with the tramp of the guard close above on his ear, and rifles ready to be levelled on him from the covered earthworks if the faintest sound of his approach or the dimmest streak of moonlight on his moving body told the Federals of his presence. He had looked death in the teeth most days through the last five years; it had no power to quicken or slacken a single beat of his pulse as he propelled himself slowly forward along the black, rugged, uneven ground, and on to the passage of the bridge, as coolly, as fearlessly, as he would have crept through the heather and bracken after the slot of a deer on the moorside at home.

He heard the challenge and the tramp of the sentinel on the opposite bank; he saw the white starlight shine on the barrels of their breech-loaders as they paced to and fro in the stillness, filled with the surge and rush of the rapid waters beneath him. Shrouded in the gloom, he dragged himself onward with slow and painful movement, stretched out on the ground, urging himself forward by the action of his limbs so cautiously that, even had the light been on him, he could scarcely have been seen to move, or been distinguished from the earth on which he lay. Eight hundred lives hung on the coolness of his own; if he were discovered, they were lost. And, without haste, without excitation, he drew himself along under the parapet until he came to the centre of the bridge, placed the barrel close against the barricades, uncovered the head of the cask, and took his way back by the same laborious, tedious way, until he reached the Virginian Troopers gathered together under the shelving rocks.

A deep hoarse murmur rolling down the ranks, the repressed cheer they dared not give aloud, welcomed him and the dauntless daring of his act; man after man pressed forward entreating to take his place, to share his peril; he gave it up to none, and three times more went back again on that deadly journey, until sufficient powder for his purpose was lodged under the Federal fortifications on the bridge. Two hours went by in that slow and terrible passage; then, for the last time, he wound a saucisson round his body serpent-wise, and with that coil of powder curled around him, took his way once more in the same manner through the hot, dark, heavy night.

And those left behind in the impenetrable gloom, ignorant of his fate, knowing that with every instant the crack of the rifles might roll out on the stillness, and the balls pierce that death-snake twisted round his limbs, and the rocks echo with the roar of the exploding powder, blasting him in the rush of its sheet of fire and stones, sat mute and motionless in their saddles, with a colder chill in their bold blood, and a tighter fear at their proud hearts, than the Cavaliers of the South would have known for their own peril, or than he knew for his.

Another half-hour went by—an eternity in its long drawn-out suspense—then in the darkness under the rocks his form rose up amongst them.

"Ready?"—"Ready."

The low whisper passed all but inaudible from man to man. He took back his sabre and pistols and thrust them into his belt, then stooped, struck a slow match, and laid it to the end of the saucisson, whose mouth he had fastened to the barrels on the bridge, and rapidly as the lightning, flung himself across the horse held for him, and fell into line at the head of the troop.

There was a moment of intense silence while the fire crept up the long stick of the match; then the shrill, hissing, snake-like sound that none who have once heard ever forget, rushed through the quiet of the night, and with a roar that startled all the sleeping echoes of the hills, the explosion followed; the columns of flame shooting upward to the starlit sky, and casting their crimson lurid light on the black brawling waters, on the rugged towering rocks, on the gnarled trunks of the lofty pines, and on the wild, picturesque forms and the bold, swarthy, Spanish-like faces of the Confederate raiders. With a shock that shook the earth till it rocked and trembled under them, the pillar of smoke and fire towered aloft in the hush of the midnight, blasting and hurling upward, in thunder that pealed back from rock to rock, lifeless bodies, mangled limbs, smouldering timbers, loosened stones, dead men flung heavenward like leaves whirled by the wind, and iron torn up and bent like saplings in a storm, as the mass of the barricades quivered, oscillated, and fell with a mighty crash, while the night was red with the hot glare of the flame, and filled with the deafening din.

The Federals, sleeping under cover of their intrenchments, woke by that concussion as though heaven and earth were meeting, poured out from pit and trench, from salient and parallel, to see their fortifications and their guard blown up, while the skies were lurid with the glow of the burning barricades, and the ravine was filled with the yellow mist of the dense and rolling smoke. Confused, startled, demoralised, they ran together like sheep, vainly rallied by their officers, some few hundred opening an aimless desultory fire from behind their works, the rest rushing hither and thither, in that inextricable intricacy, and nameless panic, which doom the best regiments that were ever under arms, when once they seize them.

"Charge!" shouted the Confederate leader, his voice ringing out clear and sonorous above the infernal tempest of hissing, roaring, shrieking, booming sound.

With that resistless impetus with which they had, over and over again, broken through the granite mass of packed squares and bristling bayonets, the Southerners, raising their wild war-whoop, thundered on to the bridge, which, strongly framed of stone and iron, had withstood the shock, as they had foreseen: and while the fiery glare shone, and the seething flame hissed, on the boiling waters below, swept, full gallop over the torn limbs, the blackened bodies, the charred wood, the falling timbers, the exploding powder, with which the passage of the bridge was strewn, and charged through the hellish din, the lurid fire, the heavy smoke, at a headlong pace, down into the Federal camp.

A thousand shots fell like hail amongst them, but not a saddle was emptied, not even a trooper was touched; and with their line unbroken, and the challenge of their war-shout pealing out upon the uproar, they rode through the confusion worse confounded, and cutting their way through shot and sabre, through levelled rifles, and through piled earthworks, with their horses breathing fire, and the roar of the opening musketry pealing out upon their rear, dashed on, never drawing rein, down into the darkness of the front defile, and into the freshness of the starry summer night, saved by the leader that they loved, and—FREE!

* * * * * *

"Tarnation cheeky thing to do. Guess they ain't wise to rile us that way," said a Federal general from Fremont, as they discussed this exploit of the Eight Hundred at the Federal head-quarters.

"A splendid thing!" said an English visitor to the Northern camp, who had come for a six months' tour to see the war for himself, having been in his own time the friend of Paget, and Vivian, and Londonderry, the comrade of Picton, of Mackinnon, and of Arthur Wellesley. "A magnificent thing! I remember Bouchard did something the same sort of thing at Amarante, but not half so pluckily, nor against any such odds. Who's the fellow that led the charge? I'd give anything to see him and tell him what I think of it. How Will Napier would have loved him, by George!"

"Who's the d—d rebel, Jed?" said the General, taking his gin-sling.

"Think he's an Englishman. We'd give ten thousand dollars for him, alive or dead: he's fifty devils in one, that *I* know," responded the Colonel of Artillery, thus appealed to, a gentlemanlike, quiet man, educated at West Point.

"God bless the fellow! I'm glad he's English!" said the English visitor, heartily, forgetting his Federal situation and companions. "Who is he? Perhaps I know the name?"

"Should say you would. It's the same as your own—Winton. Bertie Winton, they call him. Maybe he's a relative of yours!"

The blood flushed the Englishman's face hotly for a second; then a stern dark shadow came on it, and his lips set tight.

"I have no knowledge of him," he said, curtly.

"Haven't you now? That's curious. Some said he was a son of yours," pursued the Colonel.

The old Lion flung back his silvery mane with his haughtiest imperiousness.

"No, sir; he's no son of mine."

Lord Winton sat silent, the dark shadow still upon his face. For five years no rumour even had reached him of the man he had disowned and disinherited; he had believed him dead—shot, as he had predicted, after some fray in a gaming-room abroad; and now he heard of him thus in the war news of the American camp! His denial of him was not less stern, nor his refusal to acknowledge even his name less peremptory, because, with all his wrath, his bitterness, his inexorable passion, and his fierce repudiation of him as his son, a thrill of pleasure stirred in him that the man still lived—a proud triumph swept over him, through all his dark thoughts, at the magnificent dash and daring of a deed wholly akin to him.

Bertie, a listless man about town, a dilettante in pictures, wines, and women, spending every moment that he could in Paris, gentle as any young beauty, always bored, and never roused out of that habitual languid indolent indifferentism which the old man, fiery and impassioned himself as the Napiers, held the most damnable effeminacy with which the present generation emasculates itself, had been incomprehensible, antagonistic, abhorrent to him. Bertie, the Leader of the Eight Hundred, the reckless trooper of the Virginian Horse, the head of a hundred wild night raids, the hero of a score of brilliant charges, the chief in the most daring secret expeditions, and the most intrepid cavalry skirmishes of the South, was far nearer to the old Lion, who had in him all the hot fire of Crawford's school, with the severe simplicity of Wellington's stern creeds. "He is true to his blood at last!" he muttered, as he tossed back his silky white hair, while his blue flashing eyes ranged over the far distance where the Southern lines lay, with something of eager restlessness; "he is true to his blood at last!"

There was fighting some days later in the Shenandoah Valley.

Longstreet's corps, with two regiments of cavalry had attacked Sheridan's divisions, and the struggle was hot and fierce. The day was warm, and a brilliant sun poured down into the green cornland and woodland wealth of the valley as the Southern divisions came up to the attack in beautiful precision, and hurled themselves with tremendous *élan* on the right front of the Federals, who, covered by their hastily thrown-up breastworks, opened a deadly fire that raked the whole Confederate line as they advanced. Men fell by the score under the murderous mitraille, but the ranks closed up shoulder to shoulder, without pause or wavering, only maddened by the furious storm of shot, as the engagement became general and the white rolling clouds of smoke poured down the valley, and hid conflict and combatants from sight, the thunder of the musketry pealing from height to height; while in many places men were fighting literally face to face and hand to hand in a death-struggle—rare in these days, when the duello of artillery and the rivalry of breech-loaders begins, decides, and ends most battles.

On Longstreet's left, two squadrons of Virginian Cavalry were drawn up, waiting the order to advance, and passionately impatient of delay as regiment after regiment were sent up to the attack and were lost in the whirling cloud of dust and smoke, and they were kept motionless in reserve. At their head was Bertie Winton, unconscious that, on a hill to the right, with a group of Federal commanders, his father was looking down on that struggle in the Shenandoah. Bertie was little altered, save that on his face there was a sterner look, and in his eyes a keener and less listless glance; but the old languid grace, the old lazy gentleness, were there still. They were part of his nature, and nothing could kill them in him. In the five years that had gone by none whom he had known in Europe had ever heard a word of him or from him; he had cut away all the moorings that bound him to his old life, and had sought to build up his ruined fortunes, like the penniless soldier that he was, by his sword alone. So far he had succeeded: he had made his name famous throughout the States as a bold and unerring cavalry leader, and had won the personal friendship and esteem of the Chiefs of the Southern Confederacy. The five years had been filled with incessant adventures, with ever-present peril, with the din of falling citadels, with the rush of headlong charges, with daring raids in starless autumn nights, with bivouacs in trackless western forests, with desert-thirst in parching summer heats, with winters of such frozen roofless misery as he had never even dreamed—five years of ceaseless danger, of frequent suffering, of habitual renunciation; but five years of *life*—real, vivid, unselfish—and Bertie was a better man for them. What he had done at the head of Eight Hundred was but a sample of whatever he did whenever duty called, or opportunity offered, in the service of the South; and no man was better known or better trusted in all Lee's divisions than Bertie Winton, who sat now at the head of his regiment, waiting Longstreet's orders. An aide galloped up before long.

"The General desires you to charge and break the enemy's square to the left, Colonel."

Bertie bowed with the old Pall Mall grace, turned, and gave the word to advance. Like greyhounds loosed from leash, the squadrons thundered down the slope, and swept across the plain in magnificent order, charging full gallop, riding straight down on the bristling steel and levelled rifles of the enemy's kneeling square. They advanced in superb condition, in matchless order, coming on with the force of a whirlwind across the plain; midway they were met by a tremendous volley poured direct upon them; half their saddles were emptied; the riderless chargers tore, snorting, bleeding, terrified out of the ranks; the line was broken; the Virginians wavered, halted, all but recoiled; it was one of those critical moments when hesitation is destruction. Bertie saw the danger, and with a shout to the men to come on, he spurred his horse through the raking volley of shot, while a shot struck his sombrero, leaving his head bare, and urging the animal straight at the Federal front, lifted him in the air as he would have done before a fence, and landed him in the midst of the square, down on the points of the levelled bayonets. With their fierce war-cheer ringing out above the sullen uproar of the firing, his troopers followed him to a man, charged the enemy's line, broke through the packed mass opposed to them, cut their way through into the centre, and hewed their enemies down as mowers hew the grass. Longstreet's work was done for him; the Federal square was broken, never again to rally.

But the victory was bought with a price; as his horse fell, pierced and transfixed by the crossed steel of the bayonets, a dozen rifles covered the Confederate leader; their shots rang out, and Bertie Winton reeled from his saddle and sank down beneath the press as his own Southerners charged above him in the rush of the onward attack. On an eminence to the right, through his race-glass, his father watched the engagement, his eyes seldom withdrawn from the Virginian cavalry, where, for aught he knew, one of his own blood and name might be—memories of Salamanca and Quatre Bras, of Moodkee and Ferozeshah, stirring in him, while the fire of his dead youth thrilled through his veins with the tramp of the opposing divisions, and he roused like a war-horse at the scent of the battle, as the white shroud of the smoke rolled up to his feet, and the thunder of the musketry echoed through the valley. Through his glass, he saw the order given to the troopers held in reserve; he saw the magnificent advance of that charge in the morning light; he saw the volley poured in upon them; and he saw them under that shock reel, stagger, waver, and recoil. The old soldier knew well the critical danger of that ominous moment of panic and of confusion; then, as the Confederate Colonel rode out alone and put his horse at that leap on to the line of steel, into the bristling square, a cry loud as the Virginian battle-shout broke from him. For when the charger rose in the air, and the sun shone full on the uncovered head of the Southern leader, he knew the fair English features that no skies could bronze, and the fair English hair that blew in the hot wind. He looked once more upon the man he had denied and had disowned; and, as Bertie Winton reeled and fell, his father, all unarmed, and non-combatant as he was, drove the spurs into his horse's flanks, and dashing down the steep hill-side, rode over the heaps of slain, and through the pools of gore into the thick of the strife.

With his charger dead under him, beaten down upon one knee, his sword-arm shivered by a bullet, while the blood poured from his side where another shot had lodged, Bertie knew that his last hour had come, as the impetus of the charge broke above him—as a great wave may sweep over the head of a drowning man—and left him in the centre of the foe. Kneeling there, while the air was red before his sight, that was fast growing blind from the loss of blood, and the earth seemed to reel and rock under him, he still fought to desperation, his sabre in his left hand; he knew he could not hold out more than a second longer, but while he had strength he kept at bay.

His life was not worth a moment's purchase—when, with a shout that rang over the field, the old Lion rode down through the carnage to his rescue, his white hair floating in the wind, his azure eyes flashing with war-fire, his holster-pistol levelled; spurred his horse through the struggle, trampled aside all that opposed him, dashed untouched through the cross-fire of the bullets, shot through the brain the man whose rifle covered his son who had reeled down insensible, and stooping, raised the senseless body, lifted him up by sheer manual strength to the level of his saddle-bow, laid him across his holsters, holding him up with his right hand, and, while the Federals fell asunder in sheer amazement at the sudden onslaught, and admiration of the old man's daring, plunged the rowels into his horse, and, breaking through the reeking slaughter of the battlefield, rode back, thus laden with his prisoner, through the incessant fire of the cannonade up the heights to the Federal lines.

"If you were to lie dying at my feet!"—his father remembered those words, that had been spoken five years before in the fury of a deadly passion, as Bertie lay stretched before him in his tent, the blood flowing from the deep shot-wound in his side, his eyes closed, his face livid, and about his lips a faint and ghastly foam.

Had he saved him too late? had he too late repented?

His heart had yearned to him when, in the morning light, he had looked once more upon the face of his son, as the Virginian Horse had swept on to the shock of the charge; and all of wrath, of hatred, of bitterness, of dark, implacable, unforgiving vengeance were quenched and gone for ever from his soul as he stooped over him where he lay at his feet, stricken and senseless in all the glory of his manhood. He only knew that he loved the man—he only knew that he would have died for him, or died with him.

Bertie stirred faintly, with a heavy sigh, and his left hand moved towards his breast. Old Sir Lion bent over him, while his voice shook terribly, like a woman's.

"Bertie! My God! don't you know *me?*"

He opened his eyes and looked wearily and dreamily around; he did not know what had passed, nor where he was; but a faint light of wonder, of pleasure, of recognition, came into his eyes, and he smiled—a smile that was very gentle and very wistful.

"I am glad of that—before I die! Let us part friends—*now.* They will tell you I have—redeemed—the name."

The words died slowly and with difficulty on his lips, and as his father's hand closed upon his in a strong grasp of tenderness and reconciliation, his lids closed, his head fell back, and a deep-drawn, laboured sigh quivered through all his frame; and Lion Winton, bowing down his grand white crest, wept with the passion of a woman. For he knew not whether the son he loved was living or dead—he knew not whether he was not at the last too late.

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Three months further on, Lady Ida Deloraine sat in her warm bright nest among the exotics, gazing out upon the sunny lawns and the green woodlands of Northamptonshire. Highest names and proudest titles had been pressed on her through the five years that had gone, but her loveliness had been unwon, and was but something more thoughtful, more brilliant, more exquisite still than of old. The beautiful warmth that had never come there through all these years was in her cheeks now, and the nameless lustre was in her eyes, which all those who had wooed her, had never wakened in their antelope brilliancy, as she sat looking outward at the sunlight; for in her hands lay a camellia, withered, colourless, and yellow, and eyes gazed down upon the marvellous beauty of her face which had remembered it in the hush of Virginian forests, in the rush of headlong charges, in the glare of bivouac fires, in the silence of night pickets, and in the din of falling cities.

And Bertie's voice, as he bent over her, was on her ear.

"That flower has been on my heart night and day; and since we parted I have never done that which would have been insult to your memory. I have tried to lead a better and a purer life; I have striven to redeem my name and my honour; I have done all I could to wash out the vice and the vileness of my past. Through all the years we have been severed I have had no thought, no hope, except to die more worthy of you; but now—oh, my God!—if you knew how I love you, if you knew how my love alone saved me——"

His words broke down in the great passion that had been his redemption; and as she lifted her eyes upward to his own, soft with tears that gathered but did not fall, and lustrous with the light that had never come there save for him, he bowed his head over her, and as his lips met hers, he knew that the redeemed life he laid at her feet was dearer to her than lives, more stainless, but less nobly won.

THE MARQUIS'S TACTICS;

OR,

LORD GLEN'S WAGER.

"My dear Cyril, why don't you marry?" asked the Marquis of Glenallerton of his second son.

St. Albans, lying on his sofa in his rooms in Albemarle-street, smoking a hookah, and drinking hock and Seltzer, looked up, stared, and laughed.

"Why don't I marry? My dear governor, you shouldn't ask point-blank questions like that. Please remember one's nerves. Why don't I? Because, though Pascal says, '*L'homme n'est ni bête ni ange,*' I think he is most irrevocably and undeniably *bête* when he assumes the matrimonial fetters!"

"Of course," responded the Marquis, familiarly known as Lord Glen. "We all know that: marriage is a social arrangement and inconvenience, like the income-tax, and one conforms to it as such. I'm not asking you to go and fall in love and crown a thousand follies with an irremediable one; God forbid! with all your absurdities you are too much a man of the world to make me fear that. I was merely thinking——You're near thirty, ain't you?"

"Eight-and-thirty, last January."

"Very well. You have *mené la vie* to your heart's content; you are most shockingly indolent; your debts are very heavy; you *will* bet, and on the most unlikely events, too—as if you were a millionaire like Crowndiamonds. I think, considering you are a younger son, and will get nothing more from me, that a good marriage, far from being a folly, would show greater wisdom than I should give you credit for after your tomfoolery at Wilverton—the idea of losing a borough that your family have had in their pocket for ages, for a pack of rubbish about 'not bribing!' Bacon took bribes, however they try to smooth it over as 'fees,' and Walpole gave 'em. Do you set yourself above *them*, pray?"

"Certainly not; one was a lawyer, and had the devil to sharpen his wits; the other was a toper, and did very shrewd things in his cups. But don't worry me about it, pray. I assure you it wasn't any bosh about honour or virtue that made me refuse to bribe the Wilvertonians; it was only laziness on my word; I hated the bore of St. Stephen's, and didn't know how else to get rid of the affair. Indolence is hereditary and chronic in me. I can't help it."

"Well, well, you lost the election, so there's an end of it," said the Marquis, impatiently, in happy ignorance of the sneer on his son's lips, "but with regard to your marrying. Well, don't you think you could do it?"

"Decidedly I *could* do it," replied St. Albans, with a glance at himself in an opposite mirror.

"Then *do* do it. You have only to choose; any woman would have you. I don't mean a *nouvelle riche;* you shouldn't ally us with a parvenue to save yourself from starving; but such as Lady Elma Fer——"

"Not for an El Dorado! She is eight-and-twenty, is freckled, and has red hair——"

"Pray, what does beauty matter in a wife? You will have plenty of beauties left elsewhere, won't you?"

"I hope so; but I shouldn't be able to enjoy them, for one tête-à-tête with a freckled woman would have killed me."

"Talk sense," interrupted old Glen, angrily. "One would think you had no brains, Cyril. Look at it rationally. Is there anything for you but to make a rich marriage?"

St. Albans took a few silent puffs from his hookah with a profound sigh, and answered not.

"I can give you no money, and you have a terrible taste for expensive pleasures; you have lived at double the rate your brothers have for the last fifteen years. Go on as you are now, you must go to the dogs your own way; *I* can't help you; I'm en route there myself. Marry an heiress, your difficulties are cleared, and you can have your pleasures *à votre gré*. As for wanting beauty in your wife—one would think you were twenty! Your mother was plain; she had good blood and money, but she was remarkably plain; you take all your beauty from me. Now there is Avarina Sans-reproche, most unobjectionable in every way, will be Baroness Turquoise and Malachite in her own right; not exactly pretty, perhaps, but very good style: a woman who would never do a silly thing, or make a dubious acquaintance. Her mother, I know, would not object to the alliance; in fact, you need only be a little rational and passive, and I could arrange it for you; the mere whisper of an engagement with her would quiet those Jews in a moment. Are you listening, Cyril?"

St. Albans yawned and stretched himself a little more comfortably:

"Most attentively, sir; but you must really excuse my answering; it's too warm to talk."

"Well, say yes or no, if that's not too much exertion. You are in a perfect Gordian knot of difficulties. Do you see any way of cutting it but the one I propose?"

His son yawned again, sighed, and took a long whiff of his perfumed hubble-bubble:

"My dear governor, if you *will* make me speak—no, I don't see any other way; I wish I did, because really the trouble of thinking is odious; the day's so much too close to do anything but drink Seltzer."

"You admit you don't see any other way of getting out of your labyrinth of debts, and going on smoothly in the future?"

St. Albans shut his eyes and shifted his cushions:

"I said I didn't—pray don't worry. I dare say I could get a very good living as model to the artist fellows; they want handsome men, and I've no doubt my hand alone would bring in a very fair sum. But you'd think that rather derogatory to the family, you see; so that career isn't open to me."

Lord Glen laughed, and rose from his chair:

"Don't be a fool, Cyril, but go and call in Wilton-crescent. Think over what I have said, and act like a practical man for once, if you can. You *must* marry Avarina, for I can tell you for your comfort that book-makers are beginning to back

Coronation very confidently, and that I know on good authority Cradoc hasn't himself the confidence in Grey Royal that you fancy; that mare will no more win the Cup than your Park hack."

With which consolatory last hit the Marquis shut the door, and went down-stairs to his brougham, while St. Albans, letting fall the mouthpiece of his hookah, dropped his head on his hands with a bitter sigh:

"If she doesn't win I shall be ruined. What a fool I have been to mesh myself in such a net of debts and entanglements! How I shall get out of them, God knows. And now he wants me to patch up my fortunes by marriage. Avarina Sansreproche! Faugh!—the Queen's Bench were better than that. He is right—I am going to the dogs, and dragging others with me, too. By Jove! if he knew all, poor old fellow, it would bring on a fit, or he would console himself by cutting me in Pall Mall. I can't go on long like this; yet, Heaven knows what I had better do. Marry Avarina Sansreproche! Faugh!"

His rooms were the most luxurious in any bachelor house in town; his breakfast was served in a silver and Dresden service fit for a young Princess; piles of rose, green, and cream hued little notes, and a swarm of invitation cards to all the best houses, lay on his writing-table; he belonged to the best set, drove the best horses, and was a member of the best clubs in London; but for all that St. Albans, as he leaned his head on his hands, with a very real and unmistakable sigh, and dropped the languid, bored tone he had used about his difficulties to his father, had about as much worry just then on his shoulders as any man going in London.

"Marry!" he said to himself, picking up his hookah again. "What on earth put that into his head? What's the time—two? I'll order the tilbury, and go and see her again."

"I want Cyril to marry," said Lord Glen, that same morning, in one of the windows of the Conservative, to me and Charlie de Vesci, another Coldstreamer, and St. Albans' special friend—"I want him to marry: you're a good deal with him; do your best to persuade him, there's a good fellow."

"You want him to marry, sir? What for, in the name of Heaven? St. Albans is the last man in the world to suit that sort of harness, and I thought you——"

"Were the last man to advocate it? Of course I am. At the same time, if you're going to the deuce, you must put on any drag that'll keep the wheels from going down hill, must you not? You know Cyril's extravagance as well as I do. The best thing in the world would be for him to marry well, and the alliance I desire for him is Avarina Sansreproche. I have reason to believe, too, that Lady Turquoise is as inclined to the arrangement as myself. Nothing can be more suitable. She is three-and-twenty, eminently good style——"

"As cold as a statue, sir!"

The Marquis took a pinch out of his enamelled tabatière with a picture of Clara d'Ische by Mignard.

"The most desirable thing a wife can be. Secures you from all scandal!"

"But not at all fit for Cyril!"

"I hardly apprehend you. Fit for him? I am not asking them to *raffole* of each other—he is a man of the world, she is a woman of good sense—I merely want them to marry. I think she is admirably fitted for Cyril. She has good blood, great fortune; he would be exacting, indeed, to ask more."

"Perhaps; for all that, sir, I doubt if you will ever bring St. Albans round to think with you. Miss Sansreproche isn't pretty enough to please him, and I am sure he will hate being tied, however light you may make his fetters."

"What will you bet me that I, being allowed to manage it as I find best, shall see Cyril married within—let me see—I will say by the end of the season?"

I laughed:

"Very well, sir. I don't know anything about it, but I would bet you twenty guineas that by the end of the season you'll see no such thing. My dear Lord!—St. Albans will no more let himself be married than I shall."

Lord Glen entered the wager duly in his mem.-book.

"You will lose, my good fellow. He will marry when I wish him. He must. He lives very gaily and expensively.

I don't expect him to do otherwise. But you know he has nothing—*we* never have; the *racaille* get all the money in these democratic days. So you and Bellaysse tied at Hornsey Wood yesterday? You shot off the ties early; Delamere told me the sun was so in your eyes you could hardly mark the birds."

"What were you doing with yourself yesterday at noon? I thought you never went out before two, and I positively called at twelve, because I particularly wanted to see you, and your man said you weren't at home," said Lord Glenallerton, in a considerably injured tone, two days after in the smoking-room of the Guards' Club.

St. Albans dropped his eye-glass and laid down the paper.

"My dear governor, if you will call on men at barbarian hours you must expect valets who have a decent idea of the blessings of slumber and peace to tell a mild fib in their masters' service. You don't *really* mean you would have had the heart to get me up at noon, do you?"

"Certainly I should. You can get up early at Glen-Albans to go after deer, surely you can get up early in town to talk to me. It is seldom enough I want the trouble of seeing you. But your man said positively you were out. I asked him if he meant 'Not visible,' and he said no, you were not at home."

"Stupid fool!" said Cyril, sotto voce, as he took his cigarette out of his mouth. "*Bon père!* is it possible I should remember so far back as yesterday what I did with myself. Be reasonable! I have lived—let me see—thirty-one, thirty-two—positively thirty-four hours since then!"

The Marquis looked at him, took out his snuff-box, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You can leave your memory behind you sometimes, my good fellow, as completely and conveniently as a bribed witness! *I* don't want to know what you did with yourself, Heaven forbid! I came to advise you to hedge as much as possible. From all I hear, I am certain Grey Royal is very unsafe. None of that breed ever had any pace in them yet. Listen a minute, Cyril, and take counsel, if you can."

With which he dropped his voice, and detailed some chronique scandaleuse of the unsoundness of Grey Royal, second favourite for the Ascot Cup, which was going the round of some Turf circles, and altering the odds at the Rooms.

"I have warned you. I have said my last word about that cursed mare," said the Marquis, as he rose. "You will come to my house to-night, Cyril?"

"Do you want me dreadfully? Can't you let me off?"

"No; it is very odd if you cannot spare an hour to show yourself in my rooms. I do not choose that every one in town should be seen at my parties but you, and that my sons should shun my house alone of anybody in London. Fainéant is abroad, I don't speak of him; and Julian I have done with long ago. He has taken up the patriotic and philanthropic clap-trap, let him keep to it. It is so excessively low! I don't know what we should have thought in the Regency of men who ought to be gentlemen, lecturing as if they were the drunken cobblers of a Methodist gathering, and pottering about Ragged Schools to get a little vulgar toadying, and heading Social Movements as if they were Chartists or Sensationalists—it is so horridly low all that! But you, *you* are a man of good taste and good breeding, Cyril; it hurts me that you should never be seen at my house."

That speech was quite true. If Lord Glen likes anybody it is his second son, who has his wit, his beauty, and is, as the Marquis will complacently tell us, "exactly what I was forty years ago." But it was a craftily timed speech for all that, and St. Albans fell into the trap; he looked kindly at his father, and drank some hock and Seltzer.

"I'll come, governor!"

"The deuce, I never remembered that woman!" said St. Albans, under his breath, on the top of the staircase of his father's house in Berkley-square. "That's what he bothered me to come here for, and I never thought of her!"

I, remembering the Marquis's wager, followed his glance, which was through the doorway, into the Marquis's salons, where all the *crême de la crême* were gathering and commingling; and there, among other young Belgraviennes, saw Avarina Sansreproche, the subject of the Marquis's diplomacy, the future Lady Cyril St. Albans, and sole heiress prospective to her mother's barony of Turquoise and Malachite. She was what we call by complaisance a fine girl: she was not handsome, or interesting, or brilliant, but she was clever, dressed well of course, and was eminently good style, as Lord Glen averred; she was very cold in manner, and rumour said of not the sweetest temper; but she had a distinguished air, and from her height and figure told well in a ball-room.

Altogether, considering how good an alliance she would be, she was not a woman to merit the disdainful and disgusted tone with which St. Albans murmured his uncomplimentary words on the staircase as he caught sight of her at his father's ball, which made me smile as I heard them, to think how little likely the Marquis was to win his bet and shackle his son with matrimonial handcuffs, with all his skill at diplomacy, and his Rochefoucaldean knowledge of men and their weaknesses.

Avarina looked very well that night, and her mother smiled her most gracious smile when St. Albans drew near them, and stopped to say a few words to them before passing on. True, the future Baroness might have looked for an elder rather than a younger son, but the St. Albans were one of the oldest and noblest houses in the Peerage. A cadet of that family was preferable to the head of many others, and Lord Glenallerton was leader in the Upper House of that great political party to which Lady Turquoise, as vehement an intriguer as Madame de Longueville or the Duchess of Devonshire, belonged heart and soul. Cyril was his favourite son; he did not care about Fainéant, who was plain, like the late Lady Glen, and had never been in his good graces for that reason, the Marquis rating beauty as highly as any woman. His third son, Julian, he had, as he said, done with long ago, Julian being an M.P., and taking a utilitarian and educating-of-the-masses line, which was naturally the antipodes of all his predilections, and disgusted him too much for remonstrance; but Cyril always pleased him: his manner, his air, his tastes, his person, his way of life, were all in accordance with all his father's views of what a gentleman and a St. Albans ought to be. Cyril was his favourite son, and therefore did he and Lady Turquoise tacitly agree—perhaps, even, in a little boudoir conference, admit to each other their agreement—in the choice of an alliance for Avarina.

"Cyril, you entreated me to be your envoy, and I have had the happiness to succeed in my embassy. Miss Sansreproche has done you the honour to reserve you a place on her tablets," said the clever old Lord, with that gallant grace of air which had gained him so many *bonnes fortunes*, and won him so brilliant a reputation in the old Regency days with Alvanley and Pierrepoint. Men of condition, as Walter Scott says, never show what they feel, let them be startled, bewildered, or dismayed as they may, or, for a certainty, St. Albans would have shown his amazement at his father's adroit invention. "For a lie gracefully told, commend me to the governor!" he thought, as, *bon gre mal gre*, he bowed his thanks to Avarina for an honour he had certainly been most innocent of soliciting.

Cootes and Tinney's band were playing the Dinorah Quadrilles, and he had to give her his arm and lead her to the ballroom, let in for it as neatly as any man could be, while the Marquis stroked a little moth off his Blue Riband with an inward smile of complacency. His first minor move in diplomacy had succeeded, and perhaps St. Albans, though it bored him just then, would thank him afterwards. When one is drowning, one is grateful to anybody that flings us a rope, however tarred and rough a one.

"Hallo, old fellow, you are leaving early. Avarina Sansreproche won't be flattered, will she?" said I, as, about an hour afterwards, having three or four other places to go to that night, I left Lord Glen's, and met St. Albans just going to his cab.

"Avarina Sansreproche be hanged!" said he, between his teeth, as he stopped to light a Manilla. "Marry merely for money—buy freedom from my difficulties with that girl's gold, how low my father must think that I have sunk! Live on your wife's money! Good God, what lower degradation could there be?"

"Lots of men do it, though, old fellow, and think it none, when there's no better way of clearing themselves out of their difficulties."

"Exactly," said St. Albans, in his ordinary languid tone, with his pet semi-yawn, semi-sigh; "but only think of the horror of having to hear settlements read, and the worry of going through the marriage ceremony! It's far better of the two to go to the dogs quietly and gently, in a pleasant way, than to put the matrimonial drag on the wheels, and avoid Cerberus only to fall into the hug of Hecate. I've no scruples about anything, except about worrying myself. I don't care how low I sink, but you must please line the pit with rose-leaves. I wouldn't mind selling myself to the devil at all if that gentleman were in that style of trade now, and paid handsomely, but I couldn't sell myself to a wife—indeed I couldn't; marriage is an awful price to pay for a little monetary security. Fancy a woman who'd think she had a right over you, and who'd persist in bothering you, and lecturing you, and ferreting out were you went! It's better to give Leoni Levi cent. per cent. than to go through the ennui of a honeymoon. Fancy doing rural felicity, and raptures, and all the rest of it, and having to make love to the same woman one whole month long! I'd rather go to a Neapolitan prison. Why, a week of it would kill me. Milner, drive as fast as you can," said St. Albans, flinging his fusee into the gutter, and getting into his hansom.

"Are you going to La Bonbonnière's? If you are, we can go together."

"La Bonbonnière's? No. I rarely go there now."

"What for? Have you quarrelled?"

The Comtesse de la Bonbonnière was a very charming little woman, and St. Albans had found no boudoir so attractive, and no opera suppers so agreeable, as those in her Section of the French embassy.

"Quarrelled? Not at all! But we idolised each other last season; it's in the nature of things that we're tired of one another this! Good night. Drive fast, Milner!"

"Where to, my Lord?"

"To Richmond!"

His hansom dashed round the corner at a pace that might have won a trotting-match, and I got into my own cab, and drove off to a ball at Carlton House-terrace, thinking that, with Cyril's views of marriage, the old Lord, with all his diplomacy, was not very likely to win his bet, and persuade his son to enter the holy bond, St. Albans being about the last man in town to assume the matrimonial fetters, or endure them when they were on. He was in the Coldstream Guards; he was a man sworn to pleasure, and to pleasure alone; he led a gay, easy, agreeable, extravagant life; was a leader of fashion, and a referee at clubs; hated worry, loved luxury, was utterly unused to any restrictions, and was the very last sort of person to be coaxed, driven, coerced, propelled, or led in any way into the shackles Lord Glen proposed for him. But great is the might of money, and when you have Ruin on one side of you and Hanover-square on the other, there is no knowing *what* you may do, mon ami, or which of the evils you may fancy the lesser; so, with all the odds in my favour, I hardly felt sure of winning the bet I had made.

"You *must* marry, Cyril," said old Glen, imperatively, as, meeting the Coldstreamer in St. James's-street the next morning between two and three, he walked down there with him.

"My dear governor so we must all *die*, but the obligation isn't an agreeable one; why refer to it? Positively, you're as cruel as a priest laying the skull and cross-bones right on the top of one's rose chaplets. The idea of bringing up horrid topics on a cool pleasant May morning like this!"

The Marquis gave a little growl and a contemptuous sneer.

"I thought you were a man of the world."

"Did you? Far from it. I'm a most innocent and unsophisticated person; no man more so; but merit's always misjudged."

Lord Glen gave a short laugh of amusement, as well he might.

"I thought you were a man of the world, too much of one not to know that such a very unimportant step as marriage can matter nothing in our ranks. If your wife be in a bad temper, you have nothing to do but to leave her; if she begin a quarrel, go and dine at White's or the Guards'; if she bother you very much, have a separate establishment. You are not like a man of the middle class with a limited income, resting on a clientela who *viser* all his actions, and would desert him if he tried to get a little liberty, or openly infringed their pet clap-trap of the domesticities. Be sensible, Cyril; of all the married men we know, on which of them has his wife any influence? Which of them allows her to trouble him the least? Of course not; *he* is in the world, *she* is in the world: they go their own ways, and neither troubles the other. So will you and Avarina; she is far too sensible a woman to want a lover's devotion from you, or any of that nonsense, you may keep it for Madame de la Bonbonnière; she is a Frenchwoman, and likes sentiment. I perfectly understand your reluctance: you are a man of pleasure, naturally you dislike anything that may interfere with or limit your pleasure, but, believe me, in seventy-eight years I have seen a little of life, Cyril! marriage will not make the slightest difference to you; you will live in Belgrave-square instead of Albemarle-street, that is all."

St. Albans listened and walked on in silence.

"You *must* marry," reiterated the Marquis. "Grey Royal has no more pace in her than a cab-horse; what could possess you, my dear boy, to venture so much on that miserable chestnut?"

St. Albans drew his breath hard, and turned paler for a second.

"You recommend me to marry, governor?" he said after a pause.

"I do, most decidedly."

"Very well, I'll think about it; don't worry me any more," said St. Albans, languidly. "Faugh! how that fellow that passed us was scented with musk! Are you going into White's? I am."

I have always liked the Marquis myself; he has no deep feelings to trouble him, he is an egotistical and worldly old gentleman; he sometimes tilts with the most amiable unconsciousness against your tenderest wounds, and makes you writhe without ever noticing it; but I always liked him, always shall; he is very clever, very amusing, ever good natured, ever hospitable, and is as fond of his second son, in his own way, as he could be of any one. I should be very glad if anybody would tell me why novelists always fancy it necessary to make their characters *either* good or bad, quite one, or quite the other; the majority of people about in the world are, it seems to me, *neither* the one nor the other exclusively, but a mixture of both, as the Mocha your valet brings you up in the morning is coffee and chicory equally mixed. Five people out of six have no marked characters at all, and the generality one meets could neither be taxed with any remarkable vice nor honoured for any remarkable virtue; they would ruin your peace with their malice, but would not touch you with a dagger for the world, and are capable neither of a positively noble action nor of a positively bad one. You must have force of character for the extreme of both good and evil. Half the people in society are like my friend Lord Glen, who would have been insulted, no person more so, had you asked him to do anything dishonourable; but could see nothing degrading in the advice he gave his son, honestly thinking it was the best St. Albans could receive and follow, to make a rich marriage, that he might quiet his creditors now, and live on his wife's money afterwards.

"I shall win, my dear fellow," said he to me at a morning party at Fulham, as he stood stirring the cream in a cup of Souchong under a great chestnut tree on the lawn, where the band was playing Trovatore airs and new waltzes, and we were eating Neapolitan ices, flirting, and playing croquet or lawn billiards with some hundred or so of our kind in the grounds of Lady Rosediamonds' bijou of a dower-house. I followed his glance, which was to where Avarina sat, looking more animated than usual, and talking to St. Albans.

"Do you think so, sir? I hope not. Wealth is the best of all blessings, Heaven knows, but, my dear Lord, he's the last fellow in the world to be put into bondage, even for that. The idea of St. Albans married!"

"I was just such a man as Cyril at his age, and *I* married, but I can assure you I made the fetters so light I did not know I wore them. Any sensible man may, if he likes. Cyril will marry Avarina, and will thank me very much for having made him the alliance. I knew I should bring him round to my views; he is a sensible fellow, really, though he has a few strange Quixotic ideas, like those about his election. I cannot imagine where he has got them; the St. Albans were never romantic, nor the Dormers either, and romance is such a *very* queer thing to linger in a man who has lived as my son has done. He will marry Avarina, *bon garçon*, and I am very glad of it—very glad." And the Marquis finished his tea, and turned to Lady Rosediamonds in the best possible spirits at the coming success of his diplomacy.

"Dine with me to-night?" he asked, when Avarina and her mother were rolling back to Belgravia. "And you, Cyril?"

"I, sir?" said St. Albans. "Thanks, no. I'm engaged for this evening."

"Ah, no doubt; where to, may I ask?"

I dare say Lord Glen had a fond hope that the answer would be Wilton-crescent, but it wasn't; it was brief enough: "Richmond."

"Richmond? A man dinner, or a boating party, or what? You are always dining at Richmond, it seems to me; you were there on Monday, and yesterday too; with all the best houses in town open to you, I wonder you take the trouble to go all the way down there with a few men, or a few little dancers. Yesterday you threw over the Duchess's dinner for some Richmond affair. I have no business with what you do with yourself, of course, but it is unlike you, and bad taste, you are generally so very exclusive. Won't you be back in time for Protocol's reception to-night?"

St. Albans shook his head.

"My dear governor, why should I go to Protocol's? The atmosphere will be at 70 deg. I should be crushed as usual, and should only reach the green drawing-room and the Countess after three hours' steady toil. I've done so many of these things, please don't ask me; my health's too delicate to stand the fatigues of an assembly just yet again."

"Very odd," said Lord Glen to himself, as the Coldstreamer drove off, nodding a good-bye to his father. "Last season Cyril was at every reception in town; he is surely never losing his taste for good society!"

I don't suppose the Marquis liked Avarina Sansreproche, as he had a special contempt for any but very lovely women, save for matrimonial alliances. The St. Albans women and men are a family of great beauty, and have been famed for it for many generations; and Lord Glen sets the greatest possible store on it, both in himself and others, therefore I don't suppose he had any particular admiration for his future daughter-in-law; but if he made love for himself in the Regency days half so gracefully and gallantly as he now made it for his son, the reputation he won when he was Viscount Fainéant was not to be wondered at. And if St. Albans was rather lax in his courtship, the Marquis did his best to cover and make up for his short-comings. St. Albans, though I suppose reconciled, was hardly as enchanted as his father; I fancied, now and then, there came over his face a look of genuine worry; and he was less in society than usual, which, considering he was a man whom you met everywhere each season, and lived in the highest and gayest *mondes*, was only traceable to one cause not complimentary to Miss Sansreproche—that he did not care to have more of her society than he was forced, till he should be linked to her for life. But Avarina bore it heroically; she went on her ways, showing herself with her equable grace of manner at concerts, and dinners, balls, and déjeûners. She was evidently, as Lord Glen said, a sensible woman, who neither gave nor expected any romantic nonsense; and though she smiled pleasantly when she and the Guardsman met in the Ride, or at the Opera, or any of the numerous balls, dinners, and assemblies, she smiled just as pleasantly at me, or at the old Duchess of Lapislazuli, or at her terrier Azer. She did not seem to want St. Albans' attention, which was particularly lucky, for he did not seem inclined to pay it, but let that part of the affair devolve on his father. The rumour of their engagement got among the on dits of town, and one morning, in the club, I read, among other fashionable intelligence, "It is rumoured that a matrimonial alliance is projected between Lord Cyril St. Albans, of the Coldstreams, second son of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Glenallerton, and the Hon. Avarina Sansreproche, only daughter and sole heiress of the Baroness of Turquoise and Malachite and the late Hon. George Sansreproche."

The old Lord standing by me pointed to the paragraph, smiled, and took out his enamelled box.

"Never bet with an old diplomatist!"

"Is it settled then?"

"Of course!"

The Marquis gave me a glance that said, "Do you suppose anything *I* undertook could fail to be?"

"Has St. Albans positively proposed to her, sir?"

"Proposed? No, I believe not; but the affair is quite arranged, and perfectly understood by every one. Lady Turquoise and I——"

"Then there is no hope for him?"

"No *fear*, you mean! No, the marriage is as certain as if it had already taken place, and it will be the best step of his life."

"Well, my Lord, I hope it may: but, on my life, for St. Albans to marry seems as bad as for him to shoot himself. He's the last man in the world——"

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders, and tapped his box-lid amusedly.

"You men of the present generation are strange fellows! You speak of a good alliance made from social and sensible motives as dolefully as if it were a miserable, infatuated love-match. Cyril will marry, and will thank me very much for my advice. I told you I should win; there was never any doubt about it."

St. Albans was sitting in the bay-window of the Guards' Club half an hour after, when I went there, reading the morning papers, and, as his eyes fell on the paragraph that concerned himself, something suspiciously like a sneer went over his face. I suppose he thought it was an announcement of his own sale, similar to the announcement of the sale of a noble and costly library by Christie, or of a chestnut two-year-old by Tattersall.

"So you are really going in for marriage, St. Albans?" said Brabazon of the Grenadiers.

St. Albans looked up for a moment, as if he were positively startled by the very innocent and natural query; then he yawned behind his paper, stroked his moustaches and stretched himself:

"My good fellow, if I were going to be hanged to-morrow, would you think it good taste to remind me of my doom?"

"By George! I wish Avarina heard you. *Is* that paragraph true? *You* married! Jupiter! who will credit it? You're a fit fellow to take matrimonial vows, certainly. Your wife will little know what a Tartar she has caught! if she heard some stories *I* could tell her!"

St. Albans smiled a little:

"Even if you did, Charlie, I would bet you my wife would like me better, with all my faults, than any creature (if there be one) without any at all. My dear fellow, you forget you talk to the most attractive man in town."

He spoke the first words half sadly, but the last in his own light, languid way, with a gay laugh. Brabazon laughed too, and began to talk of the latest odds for the Ascot Cup next week.

"Grey Royal hasn't a chance with Coronation and Beau Sire; she'll never win. I never knew one of Capel Caradoc's horses that did," said Wyndham, contemptuously.

"Grey Royal! I believe you. She's a clever-looking little mare, but she wouldn't win the Consolation Scramble," added Tom Vane. "She'll let you in heavily, St. Albans, take my word."

St. Albans laughed:

"Very likely. Most things feminine betray confidence, whether equine or human. But I'm resigned. Where's the good of worrying? It never makes anything better; there's nothing worth vexing oneself about under the sun; it only makes lines in your forehead, and spoils your good looks. The governor's an Epicurean, and so am I; we never bother ourselves; if things go smoothly, well and good; if they don't, we turn our backs on them."

"What a lucky dog that is," said Brabazon to me, as St. Albans went out of the club. "Nothing troubles him; his life's one long round of delicious far niente, except, I suppose, he's deep with the Jews; but if they know he's going to marry into such a lot of tin as the Sansreproches, they'll let him alone fast enough."

St. Albans went home to the Albany, drank down some iced water, and threw himself into an écarté-chair, worry enough on him, now that he was alone and could give reins to it.

"By Heaven! if that mare only win, I will never bet again, I swear," he mused, in his solitude. "If she lose, I must sell my horses and everything available, pay the debts of honour as best I may, and leave England. My father is right: I live at the rate of a man with thirty thousand a year, and if I lose on that race, God knows what I am to do! And I have drawn her into my fate as well! She loves me: she would endure anything on earth for me. But she knows nothing of the world; she little dreams what it is for a man of pleasure to have ruin stare him in the face, and threaten to rob him of all his luxuries, pleasures, appliances, all he values, even perhaps to his good name. Poverty, I verily believe, would be bearable to her with me; but, God help her, I am too spoiled by the world to reach her standard, or learn her unselfishness."

Ascot week came, and Grey Royal won! beating Coronation, who had been winner of the Two Thousand the year before, and Beau Sire, who had been second at the Derby, throwing everybody out of their calculations, and gaining the Red Riband of the Turf for Capel Caradoc; giving the lie to all her foes' predictions, and proving herself worthy of her few staunch friends' trust, like a well-bred, clever, unpretending little chestnut as she was. Grey Royal won, and so by her did St. Albans.

He drove me down on the Cup Day, and never had I seen him so agitated about the issue of a race. He always betted considerably, and always took his gains or his losses with that light philosophy arising from the mixture in his character of generosity and carelessness, sweet temper and indolence, which he had practised all his life; but that day it deserted him. He was very pale; he looked anxious and agitated; and as for the last ten yards Coronation and Grey Royal held neck by neck together, I heard his quick, loud breathings, that told how much was at stake for him on the issue of the race. Grey Royal won, the Marquis was fain to confess he had been in the wrong, and his son looked like a man who had received a reprieve from the gallows or the guillotine, and drove us back to town in spirits too genuinely gay to be forced or assumed.

"So that chestnut of Caradoc's beat, after all!" said the Marquis to me on the Heath. "I am glad she did. I know Cyril has risked a great deal of money upon her, and if he have won considerably he can free himself of one or two of his more pressing debts before his marriage. But I dare say you know more of how his affairs stand than I do."

"St. Albans, you must dine with us at the Star and Garter to-morrow," said Brabazon, as we drove home. "You must. No, hang it! we won't let you off. You're beginning to grow unsociable. That's what comes of being an engaged man, or next door to it. There won't be any women, so Avarina can't be scandalised if she hears of it."

St. Albans laughed:

"My dear fellow, I shouldn't mind scandalising Miss Sansreproche in the least."

"As a preface to what she'll have to encounter afterwards, eh? Well, that's only fair. You'll come then, Cyril? I'll call for you at half-past seven, if you like?"

"Very well, do."

He didn't seem over-willing, I thought, despite the preference his father had accused him of giving to Richmond dinners over private ones. Whether he was or not, however, Brabazon took him and me up at White's the next day, and the Marquis nodded his son a good-humoured adieu from the bay-window.

"Cyril asked me what time he could see me alone to-morrow," he thought, complacently, as he returned to his papers. "To tell me he has proposed to Avarina, no doubt! Ah! adroit management always succeeds. It is only your bunglers who fail—your maladroits, who push the thing too far, or do not push it far enough."

Brabazon's dinner was a very pleasant one. He had about ten or a dozen men, and we were as comfortable as men ever are when alone. We could talk what we liked, we could smoke when we would, we had not to rake up current chit-chat for Lady Adeliza nor go through an examination in chamber-music for Miss Concerto; it was a pleasant dinner from the fish to the move, which did not inaugurate the exit of ladies, but the entrance of coffee, and a lounge at the windows to scent the honeysuckles and drink iced waters.

"I say," said Brabazon, suddenly, "do you remember that girl we saw as we came back from Telfer's boating party? You do? Well, I told you I'd find out something about her? I sent Evans down to inquire what he could, but he's such a fool, he only brought me word that the house was called Brooke Lodge, as if I cared a hang for the name of the *place!* I must ferret her out somehow. She was such a pretty creature! If I see her in that garden again, I'll speak to her, I vow, for all she flew away as if we were ogres."

"How do you know your acquaintance will be desired or accepted?" said St. Albans from another window.

I looked at him surprised. There was a flush of annoyance on his face, and he pulled down his left wristband impatiently. Brabazon laughed:

"What a shocking fellow you are, St. Albans! Can't you let one talk of any one woman without wanting to appropriate her? Poor Avarina! But do you know my little beauty?"

"What may her name be?" said St. Albans, with his teeth set hard on his cigarette.

"Marchmont, I think; I mean to find out more about her. She's too good to be lost, if attainable; she's the loveliest thing, on my honour, and you know——"

St. Albans stroked his moustache impatiently, an angry flush mounting over his forehead. I had never seen him look so irritated in his life.

"I know one thing, that if you want to be home in time for Lady Wentworth's theatricals, you must start. It is ten o'clock," he said, looking at his watch, and flinging his cigarette into the garden below.

We did want to be in time for Lady Wentworth's, so we broke up and drove homewards. St. Albans chose the back seat, and was unusually silent, smoking, and entering but little into mine and Brabazon's conversation, which was chiefly on the score of the beauty whom we had seen a few days before, when we were on the river. She had been throwing a stick into the water, towards which her garden sloped down, for her dog to fetch; her face had caught Brabazon's eye, and pleased him so well that he couldn't forget it, and being an inflammable fellow, had sworn to see it again, which appeared to him tolerably practicable, as, by all his servant could hear, she seemed to be living alone, and to be rather a mysterious young lady altogether, going by the name of Miss Marchmont. He was destined to keep his oath. Just as we drove out of Richmond we passed the palings of a garden, with laburnums and lilacs nodding their heads over them in the summer moonlight, and leaning on the top rail of the little iron gate stood this identical woman; the June evening was well-nigh as bright as day, and very fair and striking she certainly looked in it.

"By George!" cried Brabazon, who was a devil-may-care young fellow, and that night, thanks to his having won by Grey Royal, in the mood for any sort of mischief, "there's my little beauty, I vow, looking for somebody—for me, perhaps. By Jove, I will go and ask her!"

"Stop! Good God! are you mad?" began St. Albans, in a tone I'd never heard from him in his life; but before the words were off his lips, Brabazon pulled up, flung the reins to me, jumped down, and with a laugh, lifting his hat, went up to the gate. The girl stood as if uncertain in the dusky light whether he were the person, whoever he was, whom she expected or not; but before he could speak to her, St. Albans sprang down and caught hold of his arm.

"Take care what you say!"

The other looked up and laughed:

"Hallo! I beg your pardon, St. Albans. I didn't know I was poaching on your manor; couldn't tell, could I? The deuce! I fancied you'd some proprietorship in ——"

"Be silent, for Heaven's sake! She is my *wife!*"

Brabazon stared aghast.

"Your wife! Good God! I thought Avarina——"

"Is nothing to me; never was, never will be. This is my wife. Our marriage has been secret, owing to many reasons, but it must be secret no longer now insult has once approached her," said St. Albans, as he turned and beckoned to me, in his old languid, indolent style. "It's a queer place for an introduction, twelve o'clock at night at a garden gate, I must say, but will you allow me to present you to Lady Cyril St. Albans?"

"I told Cyril twelve o'clock, and it is twenty to one; but he is never punctual. He might as well come at once; he knows I shall be delighted to hear his news, though I know what it will be. If you set to work adroitly you are safe to succeed; skilful diplomacy always——Ah! there you are at last. Good morning," said the Marquis, next morning, looking up from his breakfast in his house in Berkeley-square, awaiting the interview his son had requested.

St. Albans tossed himself into an easy-chair, laid his head back on the cushion, and stroked an infinitesimal terrier.

"Good morning, governor. I'm come to speak to you, please."

"Speak, my dear fellow," smiled the Marquis graciously. "I can guess your errand, but go on."

"Did I understand you rightly, sir, that you wished me to marry?"

"Quite rightly. I do wish you—most earnestly."

"You think I couldn't do better?"

"Decidedly I do. You have my full concurrence."

"I'm glad to hear that, because it's troublesome to dispute, and you know I am always happy to please you. Will you come and be introduced to my wife, then?"

The Marquis laughed and stirred his chocolate.

"My dear Cyril, I congratulate you most warmly; you have acted most wisely; believe me, it will be the happiest step of your life."

"I think it will!"

"I know it will. I could not tell you how much I myself am pleased. Of course you have said nothing about time yet, but if I might advise, I should hurry it on as much as possible. Your Jews——"

"I have hurried it on. I went through the ceremony, and bore it nobly, I assure you, a month ago."

The Marquis stared. "Went through the ceremony? Pardon me, I don't quite understand your jest. What do you mean?"

"I mean, bon père, that I *am* married?"

"Good Heavens! Avarina would never——"

"Avarina has nothing to do with it. My dear governor, I'm very sorry, but I had anticipated your advice. Don't be vexed, governor, she will do the St. Albans credit; surely you can trust my taste. I was married the day you counselled me first. We have had to keep it private, because of those deuced Jews; but there is no longer any need. I won enough at Ascot to quiet the most troublesome, and I am able to proclaim it, and introduce her now. Don't go into a fit, my dear father, for God's sake! I know you meant all kindness, but had I never met Violet, neither you nor any man would have made me sell myself for money——"

"*Violet!*" gasped the Marquis, white and breathless.

"Poor Marchmont's daughter—his only child, indeed. Do you remember him—a man in the Bays, who ran through every sou and cut to France? I met her in Paris this spring under very singular circumstances—romantic ones if you like. No matter to relate them now; her father was dead; she was only seventeen, alone and unhappy with some wretched French people; and, in a word," said St. Albans, nestling into his chair and resuming his old tone, "she pleased me, and I was so dreadfully afraid of your fettering me one day to some red-haired woman with money, that I married her in Paris, and gave her a right to protect me."

Lord Glenallerton gasped for breath, then rose, his indignation too great to be uttered. He looked at his son with deep, mournful, contemptuous pity.

"Seventeen—alone—unprotected—and you *married* her."

St. Albans rose too:

"Yes, my Lord, I married her! Good for very little I may be, but I did not utterly abuse trust innocently and entirely placed in me."

The Marquis waved his hand to the door.

"I decline to express my opinion of your conduct, or I should be obliged to use words I should regret to use to a man who bears my name. You will see your own folly in time without any enlightenment from me. I need not say I wish our acquaintance to cease from to-day. May I trouble you to leave me?—Married a woman without a farthing! Good God! And he calls himself a man of the world!" murmured the Marquis as the door closed on his son; and he sank back in his arm-chair, crushed, paralysed, and speechless, at the ruin of all his diplomacy.

And so our wager was drawn! The Marquis's Tactics were the best joke of that season; but Rochefoucauldean, philosopher though he might be, I believe their failure rankled more cruelly in Lord Glen's breast than any lack of success at a European congress or a meeting of the Powers. He had never been foiled before—and he had made a fool of himself to so many! As for cutting St. Albans, he was too good-natured to do that, and in his heart liked his son too well to be able to sit in the same club window many days without speaking to him. He considers him an *enfant perdu*, a wasted alliance—in a word, a very great fool—but told him so one day with much unction, regretted that romantic element in his character to which his downfall was to be attributed with deep pathos, and was reconciled to him for ever afterwards. He had some slight consolation when Fainéant returned from Athens, in wedding *him* to Avarina Sansreproche; and if you asked him which he preferred of his two daughters-in-law, he would tell you—and possibly persuade himself that he told the truth—that he admires and respects the future Baroness of Turquoise and Malachite *de tout son cœur*, and has never pardoned "Cyril's Folly," as he terms the other; but as Lady Fainéant grows decidedly plainer as years roll on, and it is Violet St. Albans with whom he laughs, jokes, and tells his Regency stories, and at whom he looked most complacently at the Drawing-room, when they were both presented "on their marriage," the next season, I have my doubts as to his veracity.

SIR GALAHAD'S RAID:

AN ADVENTURE ON THE SWEET WATERS.

For the punishment of my sins may the gods never again send me to Pera! That I might have plenty on my shoulders I am frankly willing to concede; all I protest is, that when one submissively acknowledges the justice of one's future terminating in Tophet, it comes a little hard to get purgatory in this world into the bargain. Purgatory lies *perdu* for one all over the earth. I have had fifty times more than my share already, and the gout still remains an untried experience, a Gehenna grimly waiting to avenge every morsel of white truffle and every glass of comet claret with which I innocently solace my frail mortality. Purgatory!—I have been chained in it fifty times; *et vous?*

When you rush to a Chancellerie, with the English Arms gorgeous above its doorway, on the spur of a frightfully mysterious and autocratic telegram, that makes it life or death to catch the train for England in ten minutes, and have time enough to smoke about two dozen very big cheroots, cooling your heels in the bureau, and then hear (when properly tortured into the due amount of frantic agony for the intelligence to be fully appreciated) that his Excellency is gone snipe shooting to ——, and that the First Secretary is in his bath, and has given orders not to be disturbed; your informant languidly pricking his cigar with his toothpick, and politely intimating by his eyebrows that you and your necessities may go to the deuce;—what's *that?* When you are doing the sanitary at Weedon, by some hideous conjunction of evil destinies, in the very Ducal week itself, and thinking of the rush with which Tom Alcroft will land the filly, or the close finish with which Fordham will get the cup, while you are not there to see, are sorely tempted to realise the Parisian vision of Anglo suicide, and load the apple-trees with suspended human fruit;—what's *that?* When, having got leave, and established yourself in cozy hunting quarters, with some cattle not to be beat in stay, blood, and pace, close to a killing pack that never score a blank day, there falls a bitter, black frost, locking the country up in iron bonds, and making every bit of ridge and furrow like a sheet of glass;—what's *that?*

Bah! I could go on ad infinitum, and cite "circles of purgatory" in which mortal man is doomed to pass his time, beside which Dante's Caïna, Antenora, and Ptolomea sink into insignificance. But of all Purgatories, chiefest in my memory, is——Pera. Pera in the old Crimean time—Pera the "beautiful suburb" of fond "fiction"—Pera, with the dirt, the fleas, the murders, the mosquitoes, the crooked streets, the lying Greeks, the stench, the hubbub, the dulness, and the everlasting "Bono Johnny."

"Call a dog Hervey, and I shall love him," said Johnson, so dear was his friend to him:—"call a dog Johnny, and I shall kick him," so abominable grew that word in the eternal Turkish jabber! Tell me, O prettiest, softest-voiced, most beguiling, feminine Æothen, in as romantic periods as you will, of bird-like feluccas darting over the Bosphorus, of curled caïques gliding through fragrant water-weeds; of Arabian Nights reproduced, when up through the darkness peal the roll of the drums calling the Faithful to prayers; of the nights of Ramadan, with the starry clusters of light gleaming all down Stamboul, and flashing, firefly-like, through the dark citron groves;—tell me of it as you will, I don't care: you may think me a Goth, *ce m'est bien égal*, and *you* were not in cavalry quarters at Pera. I wasn't exacting; I did not mind having ants in my jam, nor centipedes in my boots, nor a shirt in six months, nor bacon for a luxury that strongly resembled an old file rusted by sea-water, nor any little trifle of that sort up in the front; all that is in the fortune of war: but I confess that Pera put me fairly out of patience, specially when a certain trusty friend of mine, who has no earthly fault, that I wot of, except that of perpetually looking at life through a Claude glass (which is the most aggravating opticism to a dispassionate and unblinded mind that the world holds), *would* poetise upon it, or at least on the East in general, which came pretty much to the same thing.

The sun poured down on me till (conscience, probably) I remembered the scriptural threat to the wicked, "their brains shall boil in their skulls like pots;"—Sir Galahad, as I will call him, would murmur to himself, with his cheroot in his teeth, Manfred's *salut* to the sun, looking as lovingly at it as any eagle. Mosquitoes reduced me to the very borders of madness—Sir Galahad would placidly remark, how Buckland would revel here in all those gorgeous beetles. A Greek told crackers till I had to double-thong him like a puppy—Sir Galahad would shout to me to let the fellow alone, he looked so deuced picturesque, he must have him for a study. I made myself wretched in a ticklish caïque, the size of a cockle-shell, where, when one was going full harness to the Great Effendi's, it was a moral impossibility to be doubled without one's sash swinging into the water, one's sword sticking over the side, and the liveliest sensation of cramp pervading one's body—Sir Galahad, blandly indifferent, would discourse, with superb Ruskin obscurity, of "tone," and "colouring," and "harmonised light," while he looked down the Golden Horn, for he was a little Art-mad, and painted so well that if he had been a professional the hanging committee would have shut him out to a certainty.

Now he was a good fellow, a *beau sabreur*, who had fetched some superb back strokes in the battery at Balaclava, who could send a line spinning, and land a horse in a gentleman rider's race, and pot the big game, and lead the first flight over Northamptonshire doubles at home, as well as a man wants to do; but I put it to any dispassionate person whether this persistent poetism of his, flying in the face of facts and of fleas, was not enough to make anybody swear in that mosquito-purgatorio of Pera?

Sir Galahad was a capital fellow, and the men would have gone after him to the death; the fair, frank, handsome face, a little womanish perhaps, was very pleasant to look at, and he got the Victoria not long ago for a deed that would suit Arthur's table; but in Pera, I avow, he made me swear hard, and if he would just have set his heel on his Claude glass, cursed the Turks, and growled refreshingly, I should have loved him better. He was philosophic and he was poetic; and the combination of temperaments lifted him in a mortifying altitude above ordinary humanity, that was baked, broiled, grumbling, savage, bitten, fleeced, and holding its own against miserable rats, Greeks, and Bono Johnnies, with an Aristides thieving its last shirt, and a Pisistratus getting drunk at its case-bottle! That sublime serenity of his in Pera ended in making me unholy and ungenerous; if he would but have sworn once at the confounded country I should have borne it, but he never did, and I longed to see him out of temper, I pined and thirsted to get him disenchanted. "*Tout vient à point, à qui sait attendre,*" they say, a motto, by the way, that might be written over the Horse Guards for the comfort of gloomy souls, when, in the words of the Psalmist, "Promotion cometh neither from the south, nor from the east, nor from the west"—by which lament one might conclude David of Israel to have been a sufferer by the Purchase-system!

"Delicious!" said Sir Galahad, sending a whiff of Turkish tobacco into the air one morning after exercise, when he and I, having ridden out a good many miles along the Sweet Waters, turned the horses loose, bought some grapes and figs of an old Turk, dispossessed him of his bit of cocoa-matting, and flung ourselves under a plane-tree. And the fellow looked round him through his race-glass at the cypress woods, the mosques and minarets, the almond thickets, the "soft creamy distance," as he called it in his *argot d'atelier*, and the Greek fishermen near, drawing up a net full of silvery prismatic fishes, with a relish absolutely exasperating. Exasperating—when the sun was broiling one's brain through the linen, and there wasn't a drop of Bass or Soda-and-B to be got for love or money, and one thought thirstily of days at home in England, with the birds whirring up from the stubble in the cool morning, and the cold punch uncorked for luncheon, under the home woods fringing the open.

"One wants Hunt to catch that bit of colour," murmured Sir Galahad, luxuriously eyeing a mutilated Janissary's tomb covered with scarlet creepers.

"Hunt be hanged!" said I (meaning no disrespect to that eminent Pre-Raphaelite, whose "Light of the World" I took at first sight to be a policeman going his night rounds, and come out in his shirt by mistake; by the way, it *is* a droll idea to symbolise the "light of the world" by a watchman with a dark lantern, *lux in tenebras* with a vengeance!) "Give me the sweet shady side of Pall Mall, and the devil may take the Sweet Waters. What's the Feast of Bairam beside the Derby Day, or your confounded colouring beside a well-done cutlet? What's lemonade by Brighton Tipper, and a veiled bundle by a pretty blonde, and an eternity of Stamboul by an hour of Piccadilly?"

Sir Galahad smiled superior, and shied a date at me.

"Goth! can't you be content to feed like the Patriarchs, and live like an idyl?"

"No! I'd rather feed like a Parisian, and live an idler! Eat grapes if you choose; I agree with Brillat-Savarin, and don't like my wine in pills."

"My good fellow, you're all prose."

"And you're all poetry You're as bad as that pretty little commissariat girl who lisped me to death last night at the Embassy with platitudes of bosh about the 'poetry of marriage.'"

"The deuce!" said Sir Galahad, with a whistle, "that must be like most other poetry now-a-days—uncommon dull prose, sliced up in uneven lengths! Didn't you tell her so?"

"Couldn't; I should have pulled the string for a shower-bath of sentiment! When a woman's bolted on romance you only make the pace worse if you gall her with the curb of common sense. When romance is in, reason's out—excuse the personality!"

He didn't hear me; he was up like a retriever who scents a wild duck or a water-rat among the sedges, for sweeping near us with soft gliding motion, as pretty as a toy and as graceful as a swan, came a caïque, with the wife of a Pacha of at least a hundred tails in it, to judge by the costliness of her exquisite attire. Now, women were not rare, but then they were always veiled, which is like giving a man a nugget he mustn't take out of the quartz, a case of champagne he mustn't undo, a cover-side he is never to beat, a trout stream in which he must never fling a fly; and Sir Galahad, whose loves were not, I admit, quite so saintly as Arthur's code exacted, lost his head in a second as the caïque drifted past us, and, raising herself on her cushions, the Leilah Duda or Salya within it, glanced towards the myrtle screen that half hid us, with the divinest antelope eyes in the world, and letting the silver gauze folds of her veil float half aside, showed us the beautiful warm bloom, the proud lips, and the chestnut tresses braided with pearls and threaded with gold, of your genuine Circassian beauty. Shade of Don Juan! what a face it was!

A yataghan might have been at his throat, a bowstring at his neck, eunuchs might have slaughtered, and Pachas have impaled him, Galahad would have seen more of that loveliness; headlong he plunged down the slope, crushing through the almond thickets and scattering the green tree frogs right and left; the caïque was just rounding past as he reached the water's edge, and the beauty's veil was drawn in terror of her guard. But as the little cockle-shell, pretty and ticklish as a nautilus, was moored to a broad flight of marble stairs, the Circassian turned her head towards the place where the Unbeliever stood in the sunlight—her eyes were left her, and with them women speak in an universal tongue. Then the green lattice gate shut, the white impenetrable walls hid her from sight, and Sir Galahad stood looking down the Sweet Waters in a sort of beatific vision, in love for the 1360th time in his life. And certainly he had never been in love with better reason; for is there anything on earth so divine as your antelope-eyed and gold-haired Circassian?

"I shall be inside those walls or know the reason why," said he, whom two gazelle eyes had fired and captured, there by the side of the sunny Sweet Waters, where the lazy air was full of syringa and rose odours, and there was no sound but the indolent beating of the tired oars on the ripples.

"Which reason you will rapidly find," I suggested, "in a knock on the head from the Faithful!"

"Well! a very picturesque way of coming to grief; to go off the scene in the sick-wards, from raki and fruit, would be common-place and humiliating, but to die in a serail, stabbed through and through by green-eyed jealousy, would be piquant and refreshing to the last degree; do you really think there's a chance of it?" said Galahad, rather anxiously—the eager wistful anxiety of a man who, athirst for the forest, hears of the rumoured slot of an outlying deer—while he shouted the Greek fisherman to him, and learned, after sore travail through a slough of mixed Italian, Turkish, and Albanian, that the white palace, with its green lattice and its hanging gardens, belonged to a rich merchant of Constantinople, and that this veiled angel was the favourite of his harem, Leilah Derran, a recent purchase in Circassia, and the queen of the Anderùn.

"The old rascal!" swore Galahad, in his wrath, which was not, however, I think, caused by any particular Christian disgust at polygamy. "A fat old sinner, I'll be bound, who sits on his divan puffing his chibouque and stuffing his sweetmeats, as yellow as Beppo, and as round as a ball. Bah! what pearls before swine! It's enough to make a saint swear. Those heavenly eyes! . . . ." And Galahad went into a somewhat earthly reverie, coloured with a thirsty jealousy of the purchaser and the possessor of this Circassian gazelle, as he rode reluctantly back towards Pera.

The Circassian was in his head, and did not get out again. He let himself be bewitched by that lovely face which had flashed on him for a second, and began to feel himself as aggrieved by that innocent and unoffending Turkish lord of hers, as if the unlucky gentleman had stolen his own property! The antelope eyes had looked softly and hauntingly sad, moreover: I demonstrated to him that it was nothing more than the way that the eye-lashes drooped, but nobody in love (very few people out of it) have any taste for logic; he was simply disgusted with my realism, and saw an instant vision for himself of this loveliest of slaves, captive in a bazaar and sold into the splendid bondage of the harem as into an inevitable fate, mournful in her royalty as a nightingale in a cage, stifled with roses, and as little able to escape as the bird. A vision which intoxicated and enraptured Sir Galahad, who, in the teeth of every abomination of Pera, had been content to see only what he wished to see, and had maintained that the execrable East, to make it the East of Hafiz and all the poets, only wanted—available Haidees! "Hang it! I think it's nothing *but* Hades;" said an Aide, overhearing that statement one night, as we stumbled out of a half-café, half-gambling-booth pandemonium into the crooked, narrow, pitch-dark street, where dogs were snarling over offal, jackals screaming, Turkish bands shrieking, cannon booming out the hour of prayer, women yelling alarms of fire, a Zouave was spitting a Greek by way of practice, and an Irishman had just potted a Dalmatian, in as brawling, rowing, pestiferous, unodorous an earthly Gehenna as men ever succeeded in making.

Sir Galahad was the least vain of mortals; nevertheless, being as well-beloved by the "maidens and young widows" for his fair handsome face as Harold the Gold-haired, he would have been more than mortal if he had not been tolerably confident of "killing," and luxuriously practised in that pleasant pastime. That if he could once get the antelope eyes to look at him, they would look lovingly before long, he was in comfortable security; but how to get into a presence, which it was death for an Unbeliever and a male creature to approach, was a knottier question, and the difficulty absorbed him. There were several rather telling Englishwomen out there, with whom he had flirted *faute de mieux*, at the cavalry balls we managed to get up in Pera, at the Embassy costume-ball, on board the yacht-decks in the harbour, and in pic-nics to Therapia or the Monastery. But they became as flavourless as twice-told tales and twice-warmed entremets besides the new piquance, the delicious loveliness, the divine difficulty of this captive Circassian. That he had no more earthly business to covet her than he had to covet the unlucky Turkish trader's lumps of lapis-lazuli and agate, never occurred to him; the stones didn't tempt him, you see, but the beauty did. That those rich, soft, unrivalled Eastern charms, "merely born to bloom and drop," should be caged from the world and only rejoice the eyes of a fat old opium-soddened Stamboul merchant, seemed a downright reversal of all the laws of nature, a tampering with the balance of just apportion that clamoured for redress; but like most other crying injustice, the remedy was hard to compass.

Day after day he rode down to the same place on the Sweet Waters on the chance of the caïque's passing; and, sure enough, the caïque did pass nine times out of ten, and, when opportunity served for such a hideous Oriental crime not to be too perilous, the silver gauze floated aside unveiling a face as fair as the morning, or, when that was impossible, the eyes turned on him shyly and sadly in their lustrous appeal, as though mutely bewailing such cruel captivity. Those eyes said as plainly as language could speak that the lovely Favourite plaintively resisted her bondage, and thought the Frank with his long fair beard, and his six feet of height, little short of an angel of light, though he might be an infidel.

Given—hot languid days, nothing to do, sultry air heavy with orange and rose odours, and those "silent passages," repeating themselves every time that Leilah Derran's caïque glided past the myrtle screen, where her Giaour lay *perdu*, the result is conjectural; though they had never spoken a word they had both fallen in love. Voiceless *amourettes* have their advantages:—when a woman speaks, how often she snaps her spell! For instance, when the lips are divine but the utterance is slangy, when the mouth is adorably rosebud but what it says is most horribly horsy!

A tender pity, too, gave its spur to his passion; he saw that, all Queen of the Serail though she might be, this fettered gazelle was not happy in her rose-chains, and to Galahad, who had a wonderful twist of the knight-errant, and lived decidedly some eight centuries too late, no wiliest temptation would have been so fatal as this.

He swore to get inside those white inexorable walls, and he kept his oath: one morning the latticed door stood ajar, with the pomegranates and the citrons nodding through the opening; he flung prudence to the winds and peril to the devil, and entered the forbidden ground where it was death for any man, save the fat Omar himself, to be found. The fountains were falling into marble basins, the sun was tempered by the screen of leaves, the lories and humming-birds were flying among the trumpet-flowers, altogether a most poetic and pleasant place for an erratic adventure; more so still when, as he went farther, he saw reclining alone by the mosaic edge of a fountain his lovely Circassian unveiled. With a cry of terror she sprang to her feet, graceful as a startled antelope, and casting the silver shroud about her head, would have fled; but the scream was not loud enough to give the alarm—perhaps she attuned it so—and flight he prevented. Such Turkish as he had he poured out in passionate eloquence, his love declaration only made the more piquant by the knowledge that in a trice the gardens might swarm with the Mussulman's guards and a scimitar smite his head into the fountain. But the danger he disdained, *la belle* Leilah remembered; rebuke him she did not, nor yet call her eunuchs to rid her of this terrible Giaour, but the antelope eyes filled with piteous tears, and she prayed him begone—if he were seen here, in the gardens of the women, it were his death, it were hers! Her terror at the infidel was outweighed by her fear for his peril; how handsome he was with his blue eyes and fair locks, after the bald, black-browed, yellow, obese little Omar!

"Let me see again the face that is the light of my soul and I will obey thee; thou shalt do with thy slave as thou wilt!" whispered Galahad in the most impassioned and poetical Turkish he could muster, thinking the style of Hafiz understood better here than the style of Belgravia, while the almond-eyed Leilah trembled like a netted bird under his look and his touch, conscious, pretty creature, that were it once known that a Giaour had looked on her, poison in her coffee or a sullen plunge by night into the Bosphorus, would expiate the insult to the honour of Omar, a master whom she piteously hated. She let her veil float aside, nevertheless, blushing like a sea-shell under the shame of an unbeliever's gaze—a genuine blush that is banished from Europe—his eyes rested on the lovely youth of her face, his cheek brushed the

Loose train of her amber dropping hair,

his lips met her own; then, with a startled stifled cry, his coy gazelle sprang away, lost in the aisles of the roses, and Galahad quitted the dangerous precincts, in safety so far, not quite clear whether he had been drinking or dreaming, and of conviction that Pera had changed into Paradise. For he was in love with two things at once: a romance and a woman; and an anchorite would fairly have lost his head after the divine dawn of beauty in Leilah Derran.

The morrow, of course, found him at the same place, at the same hour, hoping for a similar fortune, but the lattice door was shut, and defied all force; he was just about to try scaling the high slippery walls by the fibres of a clinging fig-tree, when a negress, the sole living thing in sight, beckoned him, a hideous Abyssinian enough for a messenger of Eros; a grinning good-natured black, who had been bought in the same bazaar and of the same owner as the lovely Circassian, to whose service she was sworn. She told him by scraps of Turkish, and signs, that Leilah had bidden her watch for and warn him, that it were as much as both their lives were worth for him to be seen again in the women's gardens, or anywhere near her presence;

that the merchant Omar was a monster of jealousy, and that the rest of the harem, jealous of her supremacy and of the unusual liberty her ascendancy procured her, would love nothing so well as to compass her destruction. Further meeting with her infidel lover she pronounced impossible, unless he would see her consigned to the Bosphorus; an ice avalanche of intelligence, which, falling on the tropical Eden of his passion, had the effect, as it was probably meant that it should have, of drowning the lingering remnant of prudence and sanity that had remained to him after his lips had once touched the exquisite Eastern's.

Under the circumstances the negress was his sole hope and chance; he pressed her into his service, and made her Mercury and mediatrix in one. She took his messages, sent in the only alphabet the pretty gazelle could read, *i.e.,* flowers, plotted against her owner with true Eastern finesse, wrought on the Circassian's tenderness for the Giaour, and her terrified hatred of her grim lord Omar, and threw herself into the intrigue with the avidity of all womanhood, be it black or be it white, for anything on the face of the earth that has the charm of being forbidden. The affair was admirably *en train,* and Galahad was profoundly happy; he was deliciously in love —a pleasant spice as difficult to find in its full flavour as it is to bag a sand grouse;—and had an adventure to amuse him that might very likely cost him his head, and might fairly claim to rise into the poetic. The only reward he received (or ever got, for that matter) for the Balaclava brush, where he cut down three gunners, and had a ball put in his hip, had been a cavil raised by a critic, not there, of doubt whether he had ever ridden inside the lines at all; but his Circassian would have recompensed him at once for a score years of Chersonnesus campaigning, and unprofessional chroniclers: he was perfectly happy, and his soft, careless, couleur de rose enjoyment of the paradise was aggravating to behold—when one was in Pera, and the heat broiled alive every mortal thing that wasn't a negro, and Bass was limited, and there were no Dailies, and one thought even lovingly and regretfully of the old "beastly shells," that had at least this merit, that they scattered bores when they burst!

"Old fellow!—want something to do?" he asked me one day. I nodded, being silent and savage from having had to dance attendance on the Sultan at an Embassy reception. Peace to his *manes* now ! but I know I wished him heartily in Eblis at that time.

"Come with me to-night then, if you don't mind a probability of being potted by a True Believer," went on Leilah Derran's lover, going into some golden water Soyer had sent me.

"For the big game? Like it of all things; but you know I'm tied by the leg here."

Galahad laughed. "Oh, I only want you an hour or two. I've got six days' leave for the pigs and the deer; but the hills won't see much of me, I'm going to make a raid in the rose-gardens. It may be hot work, so I thought you would like it."

Of course I did, and asked the programme, which Sir Galahad, as lucidly as a man utterly in love can tell anything, unfolded me. Fortune favoured him : it was the night of the Feast of Bairam, when all the world of Turkey lights its lamps and turns out; he had got leave under pretext of a shooting trip into Roumelia, but the game he was intent on was the captive Circassian, who in the confusion and *tintamarrie* attendant on Bairam, was to escape to him by the rose-gardens, and being carried off as swiftly as Syrian stallions could take them, would be borne away by her infidel lover on board a yacht belonging to a man whom he knew who was cruising in the Bosphorus, which would steam them away down the Dardanelles before the Turk had a chance of getting in chase. Nothing could be better planned for everybody but the luckless Mussulman who was to be robbed—and the whole thing had a fine flavour about it of dash and difficulty, of piquance and poetry, of Mediæval errantry and Oriental colouring, that put Leilah's Giaour most deliciously in his element, setting apart the treasure that he would carry off in that rich, soft, antelope-eyed, bright-haired Circassian loveliness which made all the dreams in Lalla Rookh and Don Juan look pale.

So his raid was planned, and I agreed to go with him to cover the rear in case of pursuit, which was likely enough to be hot and sharp, for the Moslems, for all their apathy, lack the philosophic gratitude which your British husband usually exhibits towards his despoiler—but, then, to be sure, an Englishman can't make a fresh purchase unless he's first robbed of the old! Night came; and the nights, I am forced to admit, have a witching charm of their own in the East that the West never knows. The Commander of the Faithful went to prayer, with the roar of cannon and the roll of drums pealing down the Golden Horn, and along the cypress-clad valleys. The mosques and minarets, starred and circled with a myriad of lamps, gleamed through the dark foliage, and were mirrored in the silvery sheet of the waves. The caïques, as they swept along, left tracks of light in the phosphor-lit waves, and while the chant of the Muezzin rang through the air, the children of Allah, from one end of the Bosphorus to the other, held festival on the most holy eve of Bairam. A splendid night for a lyric of Swinburne's!—a superb scene for an amorous adventure! And as we mingled amongst the crowds of the Faithful, swarming with their painted lanterns, their wild music, their gorgeous colours, their booming guns, in street and caïque, on land and sea, Sir Galahad, though an infidel, had certainly entered the Seventh Heaven. He had never been more intensely in love in his life; and, if the fates should decree that the dogs of Islam should slay him at her feet in the sanctuary of her rose-paradise, was ready to say, in his pet poet's words, with the last breath of his lips,

It was ordained to be so, sweet, and best
Comes now beneath thine eyes and on thy breast.
Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care
Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
My blood will hurt!

In the night of the feast all the world was astir, Franks and Moslems, believers and unbelievers, and we made our way through the press unwatched to where Omar's house was illumined, the cressets and wreaths, and stars of light sparkling through the black foliage. Under the walls, hidden by a group of planes, we fastened the stallions in readiness, and Galahad, at the latticed door, gave the signal word, "Kef," low whispered. The door unclosed, and, true to her tryst, in the silvery Bosphorus moonlight, crouching in terror and shame, was the veiled and trembling Circassian.

But not in peace was her capture decreed to be made; scarce had the door flown open, when the shrill yell of "Allah hu! Allah hu!" sung through the air; and from the dark aisles of the gardens poured Mussulmans, slaves, and eunuchs, the

Turk with a shoal at his back, giving the alarm with hideous bellowings, while their drawn scimitars flashed in the white starlight, and their cries filled the air with their din. "Make off while I hold the gate!" I shouted to Galahad, who, catching Leilah Derran in his arms before the Moslems could be nigh us, held her close with one hand, while with his right he levelled his revolver, as I did, and backed—facing the Turks. At sight of the lean shining barrels, the Moslems paused in their rush for a second—only a second; the next, shouting to Allah till the minarets gave back the echo, they sprang at us, their curled naked yataghans whirling above their heads, their jetty eyeballs flaming like tigers' on the spring. Our days looked numbered;—I gave them the contents of one barrel, and in the moment's check we gained the outside of the gardens; the swarm rushed after us, their shots flying wide, and whistling with a shrill hiss harmlessly past; we reserved further fire, not wishing to kill, if we could manage to cut our way through without bloodshed, and backed to the plane-trees, where the horses were waiting. There was a moment's blind but breathless struggle, swift and indistinct to remembrance as a flash of lightning; the Turks swarmed around us, while we beat them off, and hurled them asunder somehow. Omar sprang like a rattlesnake on to his spoiler, his yataghan circling viciously in the air, to crash down upon Galahad's skull, who was encumbered by the clinging embrace of his stolen Circassian. I straightened my left arm with a remnant of "science" that savoured more of old Cambridge than of Crimean custom; the Moslem went down like an ox, and keeping the yelling pack at bay with the levelled death-dealer, I threw myself into saddle just as Galahad flung himself on his stallion, and the Syrians, fleet as Arab breeding could make them, tore down the beach in the rich Eastern night, while the balls shrieked through the air past our ears, and the shouts of our laughter, with the salute of a ringing English cheer in victorious farewell, answered the howls of our distanced and baffled pursuers.

Sir Galahad's Raid was a triumph!

On we went through the hot fragrant air, through the silvery moonlight, through the deep shade of cypress and pine woods; on we went through gorge, and ravine, and defile, through stretches of sweet wild lavender, of shining sands, of trampled rose-fields, with the phosphor-lit sea gleaming beside us, and the Islam Feast of Bairam left far distant behind. On and on—while the glorious night itself was elixir, and one shouted to the starry silence Robert Browning's grand challenge—

> How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
> All the heart, and the soul, and the senses, for ever in joy!

That ride was superb!

We never drew rain till some ten miles further on, where we saw against the clear skies the dark outline of the yacht with a blue light burning at her mast-head, the signal selected; then Galahad checked the good Syrian, who had proved pace as fleet as the "wild pigeon blue" is ever vouched in the desert, and bent over his prize, who, through that long ride, had been held close to his breast, with her arms wound about him, and the beautiful veiled face bowed on his heart. The moon was bright as day, and he stooped his head to uplift the envious veil, and see the radiant beauty that never again would be shrouded, and to meet once more the lips which his own had touched before but in one single caress; he bowed his head, and I thought that my disinterested ungrudging friendship made the friendships of antiquity look small; when ——an oath that chilled my blood rang through the night and over the seas, startling the echoes from rock and hill; the veiled captive reeled from the saddle with a wailing scream, hurled to earth by the impetus with which his arms loosed her from him and away into the night, without word or sign, plunging headlong down the dark defile, riding as men may ride from a field that reeks with death, far out of sight into the heart of the black dank woods his Syrian bore Sir Galahad. And lo! in the white moonlight, against the luminous sea, slowly there rose before me, unveiled and confessed—THE NEGRESS!

* * * * * *

The history of that night we never learnt. Whether Leilah Derran herself played the cruel trick on her Giaour lover (but this *he* always scouted), whether Omar himself was a man of grim humour, whether the Abyssinian, having betrayed her mistress, was used as a decoy-bird, dressed like the Circassian, to lure the infidels into the rose-gardens where the Faithful intended to despatch them hastily to Eblis—no one knows. We could never find out. The negress escaped me before my surprise let me stay her, and the fray made the place too hot for close investigation. Nor do I know where Galahad tore in that wild night-ride, whose spur was the first maddened pain and rage of shame that his life had tasted. I never heard where he spent the six days of his absence; but when he joined us again, six weeks in the sick-wards would not have altered him more; all he said to me was one piteous phrase—"For God's sake don't tell the fellows!"—and I never did; I liked him well enough not to make chaff of him. Unholily had I thirsted to see him disenchanted, ungenerously had I pined to see him goaded out of temper: I had my wish and I don't think I enjoyed it. I saw him at last in passion that I had much to do to tame down from a deadly vengeance that would have rung through the Allied Armies; and I saw him loathe the East, curse romance, burn all the poets with Hafiz at their head, and shun a woman's beauty like the pestilence. To this day I believe that the image of Leilah Derran haunts his memory, and that a certain remorse consumes him for his lost gazelle, whom *he* always thought paid penalty for their love under the silent waves of the Bosphorus, with those lost ones whose souls, according to the faith of Stamboul, flit ceaselessly above its waters, in the guise of its white-winged unrestful sea-gulls. He is far enough away just now—in which of the death-pots where we are simmering and frittering away in little wretched driblets men and money that would have sufficed Cæsar or Scipio to conquer an Empire, matters not to his story. When he reads this, he will remember the bitterest night of his life, and the fiasco that ended SIR GALAHAD'S RAID!

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